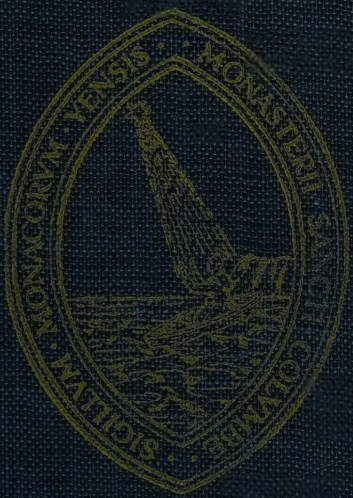
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Looking West

SAINT COLUMBA OF IONA

A STUDY OF HIS LIFE, HIS TIMES, & HIS INFLUENCE

BY

LUCY MENZIES

LONDON & TORONTO
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1920

THE DAY OF ST COLUMBA [1]

Thursday of Columba benign
Day to send sheep on prosperity,
Day to send cow on calf,
Day to put the web in the warp.

Day to put coracle on the brine,
Day to place the staff to the flag,
Day to bear, day to die,
Day to hunt the heights.

Day to put horses in harness,
Day to send herds to pasture,
Day to make prayer efficacious,
Day of my beloved, the Thursday,
Day of my beloved, the Thursday.

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, i., 163.

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Seven years before the end of the world, a deluge
shall drown the nations : the sea at one tide
shall cover Ireland and the green-headed Islay—
But Columba's Isle shall swim above the flood.
Old Gaelic Prophecy.

PREFACE

My modest purpose in writing this book is to give a simple account of the life of St Columba, of the times in which he lived, and of his influence on the history of our islands. So far as I am aware, the facts contained in the various early lives of the Saint and the results arrived at by the researches of modern scholars have never yet been gathered together and presented in the form of a connected narrative. That seems to me a task worth attempting, for Columba was the founder of the Scottish nation as well as of the Scottish Church, and his labours and achievements deserve to be the more widely recognized, that the story of his battles, his voyages, his conquests, and his life at Iona, forms one of the most romantic pages of history.

Though the mists of time have closed down to some extent on those early days, Adamnan wrote his *Life of Columba* only a hundred years after the Saint's death. Cuimine the Fair was abbot at Iona when Adamnan was there as a monk, and Cuimine had known Columba, had been trained under him as a lad and had himself written a short Life, *De virtutibus sancti Columbæ*, which Adamnan quotes almost entire in his Third Book. Adamnan had therefore every advantage for the writing of Columba's life: he lived soon after the Saint among those who had known him; he had all the manuscript records of the monastery to draw upon; he wrote at Iona amid the scenes and in the atmosphere in which Columba had lived, probably even in the very hut he had occupied. And Adamnan was a native of Connacht; he belonged to the same royal race as Columba and was born only twenty-seven years after the Saint's death.

Abbot of Iona from 679 till 704, Adamnan was a remarkable man for those times, a scholar who could write Latin and was acquainted with Hebrew and Greek, a diplomat who persuaded the Celtic Church to make several important changes in its government and who secured the "lasting liberation of the women of the Gaels" from taking part in battle. These points are mentioned to show that Adamnan was not merely a monk on a lonely island, but one of the representative men of his time. It was at the request of his brethren that he undertook to write the life of the founder of the Columban Church, a document which is the earliest piece of historical literature connected with the Highlands—"the most complete piece of such biography Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period, but through the whole Middle Ages."

It may be asked why, when that *Life* still exists, there is any occasion for this one. The answer is that Adamnan's so-called *Life* is not a biography. It is a collection of anecdotes not arranged in chronological order and not complete. Adamnan does not tell us all he knows; he tells us nothing he considers derogatory to his hero, and most of his stories are chosen because they lead up to a miracle or a vision. History is of little importance to Adamnan, what he wants to do is to give a portrait of Columba as he saw him. Consequently although his *Life* is a priceless document of antiquity, there is a great deal which it does not tell us as it might conceivably have done. To the student of Celtic antiquity, of early religion, and particularly of the pre-Christian religion of our own country, Adamnan's *Life of Columba* is as full of riddles as it is of information. It gives us a bright and fresh picture of one particular phase of Scottish life in those early times: we see the monastic system as it was practised in Ireland and then in Scotland in the sixth century of our era, painted in vivid colours with a considerable amount of detail, but as to what lay outside of monastic life we gain from it very little information. A bright

piece of real life with a great circle of darkness round it into which we would give much to be able to penetrate, that is what Adamnan gives us. By inference we learn much from his pages that he does not directly tell us, but his *Life* is incomplete, and must be supplemented by the old Irish *Lives*: that in the *Book of Lismore*, edited by Dr Whitley Stokes: that in the *Leabar Breac* or *Speckled Book of MacEgan* and that of Manus O'Donnell, a member of the clan from which Columba sprang, who in 1532 caused a *Life* of his illustrious kinsman to be compiled from every available source both in Latin and in Irish, in manuscript and in tradition.[1] But these *Lives*, too, are collections of stories and legends rather than biography.

Among modern works the student owes most to Dr Reeves' monumental edition of Adamnan, a scientific exploration of every source then known, a mine of information from which treasure is still to be extracted. And within more recent years the history of the Celtic Church in Ireland and Scotland has occupied the minds of many historians to whom I have acknowledged my debt more fully in the Bibliography. I have sought while offering as far as possible a complete and connected life of Columba, to illumine the main sources by the light of the history of early religious beliefs, of the folklore and observances of the Highlands, and of the monastic system of our islands in early times.

Though Adamnan baffles us when we turn to him for history, he rewards us generously with a living portrait of Columba. His life "even in its unconscious romancing has caught and reflected the varying tints, the light and shadows, the life and movement, the grace and mystery of the shifting currents of the ocean among the Western Isles. Whiffs of the sea-breezes reach us

[1] A fine edition of O'Donnell's *Life of Columcille* was brought out by the Irish Foundation of Chicago in 1918, edited and translated from MS. Rawlinson, B. 514 in the Bodleian Library, with Introduction, Notes and Indices, by A. O'Kelleher and G. Schœpferle, University of Illinois.

through their briny door. The authentic note of a dweller among the impressive surroundings of his island home may be caught in almost every page." [1] It seems almost as if a searchlight were shining back through the centuries, throwing the intimate domestic life of Columba at Iona into bold relief. We see him as he was, his quick temper, his passionate, impetuous ways, his nice dry humour, his love for his fellow-men and for every living thing, his unwearied labours in the service of his people. There was nothing small about Columba, his stature, his voice, his spirit, and his soul — all were big and strong. Religion was not a "solemn business of long faces" for him, but a very stirring mode of life, full also of brotherly kindness, of fine feelings and noble thoughts, of heroism, of spiritual exaltation, and of love. Not that Columba is to be represented as "surrounded from his very cradle with aureole and nimbus": rather do we see in him, in the words of Sabatier, "the finest and most manly of spectacles, that of the man who conquers his own soul, hour after hour, fighting first against himself . . . and then against the evils of his time."

Columba was the first Celtic Saint of the Celtic Church: he was a priest of kingly race, a leader who thus fulfilled all the ideals of his compatriots. He had a passionate love for his own country, "Carry my blessing across the sea," he said to a youth returning to Ireland: "carry it to the West. My heart is broken in my breast — should death suddenly o'ertake me, I die of the love I bear the Gael. Gael! Gael! beloved name!" And the Gaels loved and worshipped him. In the words of the old Irish eulogy, the *Amhra Choluimcille*:—

"He was their soul's light, their learned one . . . who was God's messenger . . . who dispelled fears from them . . . who explained the truth of words to them . . . a harp without a base cord . . . a perfect sage who believed Christ . . . he was learned, he was chaste, he was charitable, he was an abounding benefit of guests,

[1] Dowden, *Celtic Church in Scotland*, p. 126.

he was eager, he was noble, he was gentle, he was the physician of the heart of every sage, he was a shelter for the naked . . . he was a consolation to the poor. . . . There was not one from the world who was more continual for the remembrance of the Cross."

Though I have tried to acknowledge my obligations as they occur, I must make special mention of my gratitude to Mrs MacWhirter for permission to reproduce the sketch of Iona by the late John MacWhirter, R.A.; to Mrs Carmichael for allowing me to quote from the late Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*; to Dr Douglas Hyde for permission to quote his version of *Columcille cecinit*; to Mrs Mitchell and the Rev. E. C. Trenholme for permission to reprint the late Canon Mitchell's translation of the *Altus*; and to the Rev. Kenneth MacLeod for allowing me to use a story of Columba and a Rune, recovered in the Hebrides. Of the many friends who have given me generously of their help and advice, I owe especial thanks to Professor Main of St Andrews; also to Professor and Mrs James Robertson of Aberdeen, and Professor James Moffatt of Glasgow, who have most kindly read the proofs.

The deepest debt of all is to Iona herself and to her people, the friends of thirty years, whose welcome and hospitality are among the best memories of life.

LUCY MENZIES

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The FRONTISPIECE is after an Engraving of the Picture IONA: LOOKING WEST, by JOHN MACWHIRTER, R.A.

INTRODUCTION

BEFORE entering on the story of Columba's life, we must briefly trace the early history of our islands and show how their material and spiritual development opened up the way for his work as missionary and as statesman.

When Julius Cæsar brought the first Roman invasion to Britain in 55 B.C., the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland were principally Celts of Aryan origin, who had spread westwards from Central Asia. This race is referred to by classical authors as *Celtæ*, *Galatæ*, or *Galli* (all three names meaning warriors), and in the 500 years preceding the birth of Christ it was a power to be reckoned with in Europe. The Celts were always a restless people: they had never settled down for long in any country and had therefore never been able to found an enduring state. They arrived in Britain in two distinct migrations, the Goidels or Gaels coming first, probably about the ninth century B.C. The people they found in Britain were of non-Celtic Iberian stock, a small, dark race in contrast to the Celts who were fair and big-boned. When the Brythonic tribes, the Cymri or Britons arrived several hundred years later, they drove the Gaels northwards while they themselves settled in the south. They had been attracted to Britain partly by the joy of battle and adventure, partly by the rich minerals of the Cornish coast, and they called their new conquest *Brait-an* or *the high country*: the Greeks had written of it as *Albion* from its white cliffs, but that name came to be applied only to the northern part of the island, and till the tenth century Scotland was known as Albyn, Alban, or Alba. Ireland was the Scotia of early times: it was after the migration of the Scots of Ireland to the west coast of

Alban, after they developed in the ninth century into an independent kingdom, that their adopted country took their name and became known as the land of the Scots.

The Celts were fond of bright colours and glittering ornaments, and being skilled in the working of metals, they made themselves ornaments of gold, and armour of iron and bronze: they knew how to work in enamel, an art they had invented and which they practised in Britain before Cæsar's conquest. Philostratus wrote (A.D. 250) that "the barbarians who live in the ocean pour colours upon heated brass, which adhere and become as hard as stone and preserve the designs that are made upon them." But though in the earlier years of their conquest, the Celts of Britain were abreast or indeed ahead of the civilization of Europe, their isolated position soon caused them to lag. Those in the south adopted many of the customs of the Romans, but those of the north kept to themselves and were soon left behind in the march of civilization.

Britain was an integral part of the Roman Empire from the middle of the first century to the beginning of the fifth, and it was about the beginning of the second century that Christianity was first introduced to our land. Although it was not yet adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and although the Empire persecuted the Christians with bitterness and fury, yet its very magnitude was one of the chief aids to the spread of the new faith. By the marvellous organization of the Empire and the facilities of communication it offered, the Apostles of Christianity were able to travel through distant lands sowing the seed of the Gospel as they went. Rome was the centre of the world: all roads led to it. It had commercial relations with every part of the known world: the Romans worked the mineral ores of Britain, exported her cattle, and even "carried off her oysters to tempt the epicures of Rome." [1] There is a legend that an Irishman called

[1] Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church.*

Altus was enlisted by the Romans and while in their service was present at the Crucifixion: so impressed was he by the stedfast character, the meekness and gentleness of Christ that he returned to Ireland to preach this new Saviour to his compatriots. That is only a legend; but it presents a possibility. It is at any rate certain that the little body of Christians at Rome, persecuted and forced to worship secretly in that underground city of catacombs which spread its labyrinths below the splendid Rome of the Emperors, yet contrived to send out heralds of the new Gospel to the uttermost limits of the Empire. It is curious that Britain, or at least Scotland, did not get its ultimate Christianity from the Roman legions. Elsewhere the Roman army was a sort of channel for rills of the faith to reach the inhabitants of a district.

But Scotland got the gospel otherwise. The Roman legions never penetrated in force further north than the Forth and Clyde, and Ireland escaped the Conquest altogether: the southern Britons gradually became more civilized through contact with Gaul and grew apart from the warlike clans of the north, who were known as Caledonians, Attacotti, and Picts. The origin of the Picts is still disputed: they were possibly a pre-Celtic race gradually absorbed by their Celtic conquerors. These northern tribes, instead of forming one nation, were divided into independent clans who had deadly feuds with each other: prisoners from one clan would be carried off to the fastnesses of another, and the spread of Christianity is sometimes explained in such a way; the Picts, for instance, might carry off prisoners from a Roman colony and one of these prisoners might secretly be salted with the salt of Christ.

Ireland too was torn by feuds: the Irish had a genius for fighting: they not only fought among themselves but they made expeditions across the seas to Britain, carrying off hundreds of prisoners. And although the Romans as a body never penetrated to Ireland, isolated Romans visited the island. It is difficult to

understand why Agricola did not make a conquest of Ireland for we know from Tacitus that he looked over to its shores, which are plainly visible from Britain on a clear day. He knew about the soil, the climate, the manners and habits of the people, but even then apparently the task of ruling Ireland seemed a formidable one, and Agricola decided not to attempt it. This gave Ireland a position of independence and preserved her characteristic Celtic nature.

Although little is known of the progress of Christianity in Britain till the birth of Ninian about A.D. 353, there are legends of earlier date. The first is that of Joseph of Arimathea—how after the Ascension Joseph, Lazarus, and some other Christians were put to sea in an open boat without oars or sails and how favouring winds and currents guided their frail craft to Marseilles, where Lazarus became the first bishop, and then to Britain where Joseph with twelve disciples established the Church of Christ at Glastonbury. He was said to have brought with him the Holy Grail in which he had collected the blood of our Lord as it flowed from His side: that tradition gave rise to the great Arthurian legend of the Holy Grail and does not of course demand further consideration here.

Tacitus tells us [1] how Aulus Plautius who commanded the Roman forces in Britain about A.D. 43 had a noble Roman lady as wife. When she returned to Rome she was accused of cherishing a "foreign superstition" which the archæologists of Rome think, from recent excavations, to have been Christianity.

Then Tertullian, writing at the close of the second century, states that the Britons "in localities hitherto inaccessible to the Romans, have become subject to Christ," and Origen, who wrote thirty years later, mentions that the Britons had already been influenced by Christianity. It was about the middle of the third century that Alban endured martyrdom for his faith, and in the beginning of the fourth century our islands

[1] *Annals*, xiii., 32.

were ruled for a time by Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great, who protected the British Christians from persecution. We know that in 314 three British bishops sat at the Synod of Arles so that the Church in Britain must have been organized to some extent by that time. And we have another reason for thinking the British Church already a living force, for it produced one of the first heretics.

Pelagius was a Celt, probably of Welsh, possibly of Irish descent. He spent his early manhood in Rome where he produced his famous Commentary, "the earliest surviving book by a British author. . . . For eleven hundred years no Latin Commentary on the Pauline Epistles exercised a greater influence than this Commentary of Pelagius. So that British Christianity had something to be proud of in her scholarly heretic."[1] But it was in this Commentary that Pelagius first aired his heresy: it would not nowadays be called by so hard a name: he merely insisted on the possession of freewill by every human being as his birthright. But in those days that belief came into conflict with some narrow doctrines of the Church. And Pelagius, himself of a studious and contemplative nature, had for companion an Irish lawyer called Cælestius, a born agitator who pled the cause somewhat aggressively. Augustine, although he wrote against Pelagius' theological views, described him as "a man whom I greatly love, of holy and most Christian life." Jerome also refers to the British scholars, for Pelagius had apparently taken exception to one of Jerome's Commentaries and the Doctor replies in a passage of great vehemence referring to Cælestius as a "corpulent Alpine dog, overloaded with the porridge of the Scots." Theological argument was heated even in those days apparently, and it is interesting to find that there was already a British theologian sufficiently versed in the Christian faith to question Jerome's readings.

[1] Professor Alex. Souter, *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1919, "Earliest Surviving Book by a British Author."

ST NINIAN

With the birth of Ninian about 353 we come to more solid ground. Ninian or Ringan as he is sometimes called in Scotland, was born on the shores of the Solway Firth. His father, a chieftain of that district, brought him up as a Christian and dedicated him to the Church. The lad was enthusiastic for religion, for knowledge, and for travel, and as a young man made his way across the Alps to Rome, where he lived for some years. He would hear of monasticism there, of St Anthony the founder of that system, whose *Life* had just been written by Athanasius, of St Jerome who was even then violently opposing the laxness of the priests and monks, and of St Ambrose, the newly elected Bishop of Milan. It is difficult to realize all that it would mean to the young Scots student to breathe the atmosphere of Rome, recently shaken to its foundations by the persecution of the Christians, who valued life so lightly in comparison with their faith that they rushed eagerly to meet their martyrdom. But Ninian would see, too, how lax and material the clergy had become, he would feel a longing for the purer life of his own country, and so, after being ordained to the priesthood, he set out on his return journey, visiting St Martin of Tours on the way. He found St Martin—with whom he was said to be related—founding little Christian colonies, centres from which the Christian ideal might radiate abroad and trying to break away from the abuses which had already crept into Church life, and bring it back to the purity and simplicity of the Founder.

When Ninian returned to Galloway about 397, he brought a band of followers lent him by St Martin to help in founding the monastic Church in Britain. Some of these monks of Gaul were skilled in the art of building, and tradition claims that with their aid, Ninian erected the first stone church of Britain. This claim is disputed, but it is at any rate certain that the *Candida Casa* or White House, afterwards known as Whithorn, was a

centre from which a fresh impetus was given to the spread of the Gospel—both in Britain and Ireland, for the peninsula of Galloway lies near the Irish coast. The building of the little church was only begun when Ninian heard of the death of St Martin, and so when it was completed he dedicated it to his memory. Then he proceeded to found a monastery where he could educate young men in the practice of the monastic life, and on the shores of the Solway Firth guarded by the wild Galloway hills he established his *Magnum Monasterium* " the first University of Scotland." Irish monks were to come there to carry back to their native land that system of monasticism which they afterwards spread over the whole of northern Europe.

At the time when Ninian returned to Galloway, the inhabitants of Northern Britain were pushing further and further south in their incessant raids, and it was to these savage peoples, Caledonians, Picts, and Attacotti that Ninian directed his labours. Central Scotland at that time was covered with a vast forest called the Caledonian Wood which was full of wild animals, boars, wolves, and foxes. The people were clad in the skins of these creatures, their bodies painted, their faces covered with shaggy hair. They lived chiefly on the spoils of the hunt, and their lives were spent in ceaseless warfare against the Britons, who complained that the Picts " drove them into the sea and the sea drove them back again into the arms of the barbarians." Ninian worked chiefly in the district between the Firth of Forth and the Grampians, but is said to have carried his mission along the whole of the east coast of Scotland as far north as the Shetland Islands. This Church of the Picts, founded by St Ninian, endured for nearly 500 years, and was till the ninth century the only Church of south-western Scotland. History throws little light on the personality of Ninian : the official biography is that of a Saint written up to type : we know that he taught his monks to grow leeks, and that he believed in the superstitions of the age, for

he drew mystic circles round the settlements to protect men and animals from the powers of evil.

After Ninian's death his tomb at the *Candida Casa* was one of the great pilgrimage places of Scotland for hundreds of years. His disciples carried on his work both in his monastery and throughout southern Pictland. But Ninian died about 432, not long after the end of the Roman occupation, and the invasion of Saxon hordes carried "fire and sword and sacrilege from one end of the island to the other, pulling down public and private buildings, devastating churches, breaking the sacred stones of the altars, and murdering the pastors along with their flocks." Much of Ninian's work was undone, many of his churches destroyed and many of his converts lapsed again into paganism. His Church was never entirely wiped out: it endured till the Kingdoms of the Scots and the Picts were united and the Churches of Ninian and Columba became one. Many famous Irish saints were educated at the *Candida Casa*, and received there the monastic ideal they applied so successfully in their own country. So that Columba benefited directly from the labours of his illustrious predecessor. It has lately been attempted [1] to compare the labours of Ninian and Columba to Columba's disadvantage. This seems unnecessary. Both worked for the same end though they form different links in the chain. It was Ninian who first brought the monastic ideal to our islands, and Columba's mission might not have been possible but for Ninian. On the other hand, without Columba's labours the work of Ninian might have remained longer incomplete and the evangelization of the Scottish Highlands might have been put back by centuries.

St Patrick

The next important step in the progress of Christianity in our islands is the mission of St Patrick, the

[1] Scott, *The Pictish Nation*, p. 21 *sqq.*

Apostle of Ireland. His whole history is obscure : some historians regard him as a purely mythical figure, but that is an extreme view. The following is the outline of his history so far as we can see it.

He was born probably about 389, either at Bannaven on the lower reaches of the Severn or at Dumbarton on the Clyde. His father was a decurion—a municipal dignitary of the Empire—and his grandfather a presbyter of the Church, so that Patrick was a Roman citizen born of Christian parents. When a lad of sixteen, he was carried off to Ireland—*ad ultimum terræ* as he called it—by a band of Irish robbers. For six years he worked as a swine-herd on the slopes of Mount Miss in Antrim, and he writes of how his soul was opened to the love of God, how he would rise from his couch of dried heather and bracken on the hill-side and go out to pray in the open, under the starry sky—" there was no laziness in me," he wrote, " for the Spirit was burning within me." In spite of this new joy in religion, he longed to get back to his own people, but when at last he contrived to escape he was carried over to Gaul. After many adventures, he determined to return to Ireland as a missionary. He was led to this determination by a dream in which the Irish people appeared to him, " We pray thee, holy youth," they implored, " come again and walk amongst us as before ! " But Patrick was conscious of his want of education, and went first to Auxerre, where he studied for several years and was ordained deacon.

It was about this time that the heads of the British Church appealed for help to stamp out the Pelagian heresy which had spread over to their island, and the bishops of Gaul sent Germanus of Auxerre on this errand : " he preached . . . not only in the churches but at the cross-roads and in the fields. He argued publicly against the Pelagian doctors in presence of the entire population. . . . The illustrious Bishop, who had been a soldier in his youth, showed once more the bold ardour of his early profession in defence of the

people he came to evangelize. At the head of his disarmed converts he marched against a horde of Saxons and Picts who were leagued together against the Britons and put them to flight by making his band repeat three times the cry *Hallelujah*! which the neighbouring mountains threw back in echoes." [1]

It was probably about two years later that Pope Celestine sent Palladius to be first Bishop of the Scots in Ireland. (The Scots were the Gaels of Ireland who lived in Dalriada, a district roughly equivalent to north-east Ulster.) He worked for a short time in the neighbourhood of Wicklow but had no great success, and after a year he died. Germanus had by this time returned to Auxerre, where in 432 he consecrated Patrick Bishop of Ireland in succession to Palladius. Shortly afterwards, accompanied by a band of disciples, Patrick set out with high hopes for the conquest of Northern Ireland to Christianity.

Patrick was not a scholar: he tells us himself that he was "rude and unlettered": he had spent the years most youths spend at their books, herding swine on the hillside and so his Christianity was that of revelation rather than of the text-book. We know that he was acceptable to the people: so grateful were they for his teaching that according to the old Irish saying, "If he had accepted all that was offered him he would not have left as much as would feed two horses for the Saints who came after him." Laoghaire, the High King of Ireland, regarded his mission with tolerance, and though he did not himself accept Christianity, his brother Conall — the grandfather of Columba — was baptized by the Saint.

We gather most of what we know about St Patrick from his *Confessions* and his *Epistle against Coroticus*, a chieftain of Wales, who waged incessant warfare on the coast of Ireland and carried off many of Patrick's converts. From the study of these two documents we are able to appreciate the difficulties Patrick had

[1] Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, iii., 18.

to contend against, and we find the gist of his teaching in the story of the conversion of the daughters of Laoghaire.

"The Saint and his Bishops were sitting round a well, when these two maidens came to them. 'Who is God?' they asked. 'Where is his dwelling? Has he sons and daughters, and has he gold and silver? Is he immortal, your God? Is he fair? Has his son been fostered by many? Are his daughters dear to the men of the world and fair in their eyes? Is he in heaven or in earth? Is he in the sea, in the rivers, in the hill-places, in the valleys? Tell us how we may know him, in what wise he will appear? How is he discovered? Is he found in youth or old age?'

"And St Patrick replied, 'Our God is the God of all men, the God of Heaven and earth, of sea and rivers, of sun and moon and stars, of the lofty mountain and the lowly valleys, the God above Heaven and under Heaven. He has his dwelling around Heaven and earth and sea and all that in them is. He inspires all, he quickens all, he dominates all, he supports all. He lights the light of the sun: he furnishes the light of the night: he has made springs in the dry land and has set stars to minister to the greater lights. He has a Son, co-eternal with himself and like unto himself. The Son is not younger than the Father, nor the Father older than the Son. And the Holy Spirit breathes in them. The Father the Son and the Spirit are not divided. I wish to unite you with the Heavenly King, as ye are the daughters of an earthly King. Believe!'

"'Teach us most diligently,' they replied, 'how we may believe in the Heavenly King.' Then Patrick taught them and baptized them, putting a white veil on their heads. . . . They begged that they might behold the face of Christ, but Patrick said, 'Until ye taste of death ye cannot see the face of Christ, and unless ye shall receive the sacrifice.' They answered, 'Give us the sacrifice that we may see the Son, our

bridegroom.' And they received the Eucharist and fell asleep in death."[1]

Magic and wizardry were rife in Ireland as in all northern Europe at this time, and the Druids had the supreme power in religious as in secular matters. An ancient incantation, or *Lorica*, ascribed to St Patrick shows that while the poet in him was fully alive to the beauty and mystery of the world, he was still influenced by the pagan superstitions of the age. The Druid headquarters were at Tara where the chieftains lived, and there is a famous legend telling how St Patrick overcame the Druids, celebrated Easter in their stronghold and finally converted the chiefs. The source of the power through which he accomplished these things is revealed in a verse of the *Lorica*:

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
Christ in the fort,
Christ in the chariot seat,
Christ in the poop,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Although there is no certain proof that this hymn was written by St Patrick, it is of great antiquity and preserves the spirit of the earliest Christianity of Ireland.

St Patrick died about 461. Christianity existed in Ireland before his time, but he organized the feeble church he found there, spread Christianity in those

[1] Bury, *St Patrick*, p. 138. Putting a veil on the heads of converts was to prevent the sacred oil with which they had been anointed from falling down. This story is regarded as authentic because it corresponds to the ritual of the early Church. There was probably a lapse of time between the receiving of the Sacrament and the death of the maidens; the chronicler wishes to emphasize that only after death could they see Christ.

parts of the island which were still pagan, and brought the Irish Church into communication with the main stream of Christianity. Another gift he and his disciples are credited with having brought to Ireland was the Latin tongue. Latin was the language of the Roman Church, and its introduction into Ireland opened the gates of learning to those schools which were to make Ireland famous in after years. But St Patrick could not himself have founded all these schools: many of them may have owed their existence to scholars from Gaul, who in the beginning of the fifth century had been forced by successive invading waves of Huns, Vandals, Alans, and Visigoths, to flee their own country and seek refuge in "transmarine parts," that is in Ireland, which was reputed on the Continent "a rich, fertile, and prosperous country with a salubrious climate!" [1]

St Bridget

Seven years before St Patrick died, a child was born in Ulster who was brought up by his disciples, and became known as St Bridget of Kildare. She was descended from the same race as Columba, but as a child she was poor, she herded sheep, fed the birds, and was ever afterwards mindful of the poor, because she had suffered poverty herself. Bridget had the gift of prophecy: she foretold the birth of St Columba, saying that "a young scion would be born in the north and would become a great tree whose top would reach over Erin and Alban." The early Church had great belief in the power of her intercession partly because she came to be identified with the Celtic pagan goddess Brigit. The Saint was possibly regarded as a reincarnation of the goddess who was looked upon as the mother of civilization, the giver of fire and fertility, the teacher of arts and industry. There are innumerable legends about St Bridget, the "foster-mother of Christ," the "Bride of the Hebrides." Once she was working at a

[1] Kuno Meyer, *Learning in Ireland in the Fifth Century*.

mountain dairy "having twelve cows with her and she collecting butter . . . the churning she made was divided into twelve portions in honour of the Lord's twelve disciples. And the thirteenth portion was set so that in honour of Christ it was greater than every other portion, and it was given to the poor and to guests. For she used to say that Christ was in the person of every faithful guest. . . . Now there never hath been anyone more bashful or more modest or more gentle or more humble or sager or more harmonious than Brigit. . . . She was forgiving, she was loving . . . she was a temple of God. Her spirit and her mind were a temple of rest for the Holy Ghost. . . . She is the prophetess of Christ . . . she is the Mary of the Gael."

Bridget died in 523, two years after the birth of Columba. A Pictish king called Nectan who had been driven away from his kingdom and taken refuge in Ireland, asked Bridget to pray for him. This she did, prophesying that he should return in peace to his own kingdom. Her prophecy came true, and after her death Nectan dedicated a church in her honour at Abernethy in Fifeshire: Bridget's fame spread from there over Scotland, where many churches were dedicated to her memory.

There was therefore a certain amount of intercourse between the Churches of Ireland and Scotland; Irish monks are known to have founded churches in Scotland before Columba's day. Irish youths trained at the *Candida Casa* naturally returned to Scotland or sent their disciples to spread among her Highland glens the ideal they had learned in distant Galloway. St Colmoc or Mocholmoc, for example, founded a church on the island now called Inchmahome in the Lake of Menteith, and St Fillan established a church on the shores of Loch Earn.

The Early Church in Ireland

What we know about the early Church in Ireland comes chiefly from two old documents, the *Catalogue*

of Saints and the *Litany of Œngus the Culdee*, both of which date from the ninth century. From them we learn that for about a hundred years after the coming of St Patrick the faith was preached in Ireland by his disciples and their immediate successors. The early Irish Church had three distinct periods, which have been called the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, *Sanctissimus*, *Sanctior*, and *Sanctus*.

The First Order of Catholic Saints "was in the time of Patricius: and then they were all bishops, famous and holy and full of the Holy Ghost, 350 in number, founders of churches. They had one head, Christ, and one chief, Patricius: they observed one mass, one celebration, one tonsure from ear to ear. They celebrated one Easter on the fourteenth moon after the vernal equinox, and what was excommunicated by one church all excommunicated. This first church, which was like the sun, most holy and feared not the blast of temptation, rejected not the services and society of women." [1]

The first clergy were largely foreigners, sons and descendants of the disciples St Patrick had brought with him from Gaul. Their time was completely taken up with the work of converting the islanders and founding churches, and St Patrick seems to have consecrated a bishop to rule over every church he founded.

Ireland was so completely under the tribal system that the first clergy had to secure the conversion of the rulers and heads of clans before they could hope to make any impression on the people. They had to do this for two reasons: first, because the people were so intensely loyal to their clan and chief that they would not embrace a new faith if the head of their clan had not done so, and second, because in order to live, the new Church had to obtain grants of land on which it could grow the grain and pasture the cattle and sheep necessary for the maintenance of the community. Although this

[1] The quotations from the *Catalogue of Saints* are taken from the translations in Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii.

early Church did convert many chieftains and petty kings and so procured enough land to ensure its subsistence, the High King of Ireland was not converted by St Patrick; it was not till 513 that a Christian king reigned over Ireland.

As the secular system of Ireland was tribal so also was the system of Patrick's church. In each tribe or clan he converted he established a Collegiate Church, presided over by seven bishops, who whenever possible were all of one family. This seems a counsel of perfection to modern ears, but large families were the rule in those days. "The Church was organized . . . on the basis of the tribe; it was simply a series of Christian communities bound together on the family principle which formed the characteristic feature of Celtic national life. This identity of the Church with the forms of Celtic Society enabled it to maintain its ground amid the most frightful disorders and . . . fitted it to wield on European Christendom a far-reaching influence." [1] And just as the secular head of the clan held his office by right of heredity and succession, so also the bishop, the religious head of the clan, was invariably the heir of the bishop who had preceded him. It sometimes happened that the secular head was also the religious head, and in such a case the devotion of the clan to its chief was strengthened by this double bond. Before he died St Patrick saw the young Irish Church established in the north, but after his death the Druids regained their power to some extent, and it was not till this Church was succeeded by a system of monasticism that Christianity became firmly rooted in Ireland.

The monastic system first came to Ireland, as we have seen, through St Ninian, who brought it to Scotland from St Martin of Tours. One of the many Irish youths trained in Ninian's monastery in Galloway was St Finnian of Moville (or Magh Bile, County Down), the future teacher of Columba. But the influence of Ninian's *Candida Casa* was felt chiefly in the north of

[1] MacKinnon, *Culture in Early Scotland*, p. 148.

Ireland: the south received the same ideal through another St Finnian, also an Irishman, who lived in Britain as a young man and was a disciple of three famous Welsh saints, St Cadoc, St Gildas, and St David. Then he went back to Ireland to establish the monastery of Clonard from which "saints came out in as great numbers as Greeks of old from the sides of the horse of Troy." These two Finnians were the founders of what has been called the Second Order of Saints in Ireland. Inspired by their influence and trained in monasteries founded by them and their disciples, a great body of missionaries went forth to combat paganism not only in Ireland but all over Europe. And one of the greatest of these missionaries was St Columba.

This second, monastic Church had several points of difference from the first: by far the greater number of its members were natives of Ireland. The *Catalogue of Saints* describes it thus: "The Second Order was of Catholic Presbyters. For in this Order there were few bishops and many presbyters, in number three hundred. They had one head, our Lord: they celebrated different masses and had different rules, one Easter on the fourteenth moon after the equinox, one tonsure from ear to ear: they refused the services of women, separating them from the monasteries." This Second Order, then, did fear "the blast of temptation," and it is on this account apparently that "the First Order is described as like the sun most holy: the Second like the moon, and holy in an inferior degree only." The prohibition referred only to the employment of women in the monasteries, and had no connection with the later rules which forbade the monks ever to look on the face of a woman.)

The monastic Church had certain rights which it claimed from the clan, the "first fruits and firstlings, which were due to a Church from her members. . . . Every first-born, that is, every first birth of every human couple . . . also every first male animal. . . . First fruits are the fruit of the gathering of every new produce,

whether small or great, and every first calf and every first lamb which is brought forth in the year." The Church also claimed " every tenth birth afterwards . . . every tenth plant of the plants of the earth and of cattle . . . and every seventh day of the year to the service of God." The law governing the inheritance of an eldest son thus given to the Church, was that he should obtain " as much of the legacy of his father as every lawful son which the mother has . . . and he shall render the service of a free monk to the Church, and the Church shall teach him learning : for he shall obtain more of a divine legacy than a legacy not divine."[1]

In return for these rights the clan demanded from the Church " baptism and communion and requiem of soul . . . with the recital of the Word of God to all who listen to it and keep it." The Church and the tribe were thus united by the closest ties, the life of the one was dependent on the life of the other.

Irish monasticism gave fresh impetus to the spread of Christianity : hundreds of Irish monks went forth to the adventure of winning souls for Christ in foreign lands, in Britain, Gaul, Italy, and indeed all over northern Europe. Many of the famous saints of Italy were of Irish origin, Columbanus of Bobbio was trained in Comgall's monastery at Bangor (Co. Down), as was his friend and fellow-traveller, St Gallus of St Gall in Switzerland : St Cataldus of Tarentum was a native of Munster, while St Frigidian, Bishop of Lucca, is claimed by Italian church archives to have been the same as St Finnian of Moville, the teacher of Columba. Though this legend is no doubt a confusion of two saints of the same name, it seems certain that the Bishop of Lucca was an Irishman. These instances might be multiplied many times, but serve to show that Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries was the well-spring of monasticism and of learning in Europe, a result partly due to the impetus of monasticism, partly perhaps to the learning of the fugitive scholars of Gaul.

[1] Ancient Laws, quoted by Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, ii., 71 *sqq*.

As a rule, each of these monks took twelve companions, following the example of the Founder of their Faith, some even took more, and so this island, lying out in the Atlantic—*ad ultimum terræ*—gave fresh life and vigour to the spread of Christianity. For two centuries the Irish were foremost in the conversion of pagan and half Christian Europe: "their exertions at this time were so undeniable as to leave France, Switzerland, and Belgium under a debt of everlasting gratitude. . . . At the moment when Celtic vitality seemed about to perish in Gaul and Great Britain under the double pressure of Roman decay and Germanic invasion, Ireland appeared among all the Christian races as the one most zealous for the spread of the Gospel. From the moment that this green Erin had seen the sun of faith rise upon her she had vowed herself to it with an ardour and tender devotion which became her very life." [1]

These companies of Irish monks must have caused much surprise on the Continent, so different were they from the preachers the people had known before. They wore a coarse outer cloak of natural coloured fleece with a finer tunic under it, they carried a stout stick or *bachall*, a leather water-bottle and a wallet containing their few possessions. "They were tonsured bare on the front of the head while the long hair behind flowed down on the back and the eyelids were painted or stained black. . . . They spoke a strange language amongst themselves, but used Latin to those who understood it and made use of an interpreter when preaching." [2] In later years the Irish monks were so numerous in Europe that, according to the Bollandists, "all saints whose origin could not be traced, were supposed to have come from Ireland or Scotland." Many of these missionaries were learned men, and most of the schools of Europe at that time had Irish monks among their teachers.

The Third Order of the Irish Church, which followed the monastic Order and existed simultaneously with it, was

[1] Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, iii., 388.

[2] Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, i., 343.

an Order of Anchorites or Culdees from *Ceal De*, that is, the servant or companion of God. The name is generally used in connection with a later body, but this type of religious was known in the Celtic Church almost from its beginning. The *Catalogue of Saints* describes the *Ceal De* as "holy Presbyters and a few bishops who dwelt in desert places, and lived on herbs and water and alms . . . they shunned private property." This life of seclusion appealed to the Celt, offering him a life alone with nature, far from the strife of men. Each of the Anchorites built himself a cell, and it was not unusual for those who felt the call of the sea to set sail in a coracle and land on some lonely island, where the melancholy cry of the sea-birds was the only sound that broke in on their meditations. There are remains of several such communities of hermits on islands round the Irish coast. The most extraordinary are those on the Michael Skellig off the coast of Kerry. The island lies seven miles off the land, a sheer rock rising to a height of 700 feet. "The sea is ninety fathoms deep . . . and the waves rage round the island sending sheets of foam right up to the lighthouse, which stands 130 feet above high water." The ascent used by the Anchorites up the face of the cliff, is a perilous climb even for an unburdened man, and they must have toiled up it with heavy loads. A flight of over 600 steps now leads up to the ruins—cells, oratories, wells, crosses, and burying-places. To reflect on the lives of these men is to marvel at their faith and devotion. No difficulty could daunt them, no sacrifice was too great to make, and though some may differ from the hermits of the Michael Skellig in wondering whether theirs was the mode of life best suited to further the Gospel of Christ, no one can fail to respect their perseverance. They saw their light, and they followed it with the whole unquestioning fervour of their souls—the service of God was to them the first thing in life, so much the first that other considerations ceased to exist. "The *Ceal De* possessed no affection for ecclesiastical organiza-

tion. . . . He was God's man . . . to know the will of God was meat and drink: to do it was life. . . . He had not fled from mankind with the selfish motive of winning his own personal salvation, but to testify . . . to the blessedness of the simple, righteous, divinely guided life." [1]

But though Irish monasticism did produce these hermits, it is more famous for its teachers and preachers. It established Christian colonies all over the island, living examples of the Christian life where evil and false superstition and the worship of false gods were combatted and where the youth of the island was trained to carry the torch to other lands. These missionaries gave active proof of their interest in the people: they not only preached the Gospel, they healed the sick, helped the poor, and spread abroad better methods of agriculture and husbandry, heightening wherever they went the standard of civilization.

Migration of an Irish Colony to Scotland

Towards the end of the fifth century, probably in 498, a whole clan who were already Christian migrated from Ireland to Kintyre, on the west coast of Scotland. They were Scots or Gaels from Dalriada, among whom St Patrick had established his church. He had found Dalriada ruled by the twelve sons of Erc, a king of the tribe of O'Neill descended from a monarch named Cairbre-Riada, hence the name Dal-Riada. These colonists spread along the coast of our modern Argyll (Arrer-Gael, land-of-the-Gael) northwards, till their territory included Argyll and its adjacent islands, Arran, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, part of Mull, the small island of Iona and its outlying neighbour, Tiree. The colony was led by three of the sons of Erc, Fergus Mor, Angus Mor, and Loarn Mor, of whom one at least had been baptized by St Patrick.

For fifty years these Irish Gaels extended the bound-

[1] Scott, *The Pictish Nation*, p. 513.

aries of their new kingdom without coming into serious collision with the Picts. Fergus Mor died three years after he had brought over his colony of 150 souls, which under his descendants went on quietly insinuating itself into western Pictland. But in 560, in the reign of Gabhran MacDomangart, Brude, king of the Picts, showed his resentment at their encroaching on his territory, and leading his forces against them he defeated them and killed Gabhran their king. Many of the islands of which the colonists had taken possession were wrested from them, they were driven back, and their very existence as a community was threatened. It was this disaster, as we shall see, which called forth the sympathy and help of Columba, who belonged to the same race.

The three sons of Erc who had led the colony were buried in Iona, where a collegiate institution seems to have been founded, as the ancient *Litany of Œngus the Culdee* speaks of the seven bishops of Hii (that is Iona). So that the message of Christianity had come to Iona before Columba, though it was not to spread or become powerful in the Highlands till his genius established it forever in the hearts of the Scots.

ST COLUMBA OF IONA

CHAPTER I

YOUTH AND TRAINING

It was in the year 521, in a wild and remote district of Donegal, that Columba first saw the light. The exact day of his birth is not known; it was probably the 7th of December and a Thursday, for ancient Hebridean folklore holds Thursday, the day of the kind Columcille, to be a lucky day.

His father Fedlimidh, the chieftain of that district, belonged to the tribe of the Cinel Conaill, a branch of the northern Hy Neill who were descended from that great king of Ireland, Niall of the Nine Hostages. (This Niall, the great-grandfather of Columba, was king of Ireland when St Patrick, then a lad of sixteen, was brought over from Britain as a slave.) Columba's grandmother Erca was a daughter of King Erc and sister of Fergus Mor who led the Scots colony from Ireland to Argyll in the end of the fifth century, while Eithne, Columba's mother, belonged to the ruling house of Leinster. So that the boy came of the ruling caste and might himself have been king of Ireland had his mind not been set on conquests of a different nature.

Columba's birth had been foretold many years before by the wise men of Ireland as well as by St Bridget. St Patrick, while blessing a chieftain of the tribe of O'Neill, had prophesied the birth of a great man to that race:

> A man child shall be born of his family,
> He will be a sage, a prophet, a poet,
> A loveable lamp, pure, clear,
> Who will not utter falsehood.

He will be a sage, he will be pious,
He will be the King of the royal graces,
He will be lasting and will be ever good,
He will be in the eternal kingdom for his consolation.

And a disciple of Patrick's called Maucta had prophesied that "in the last ages of the world a son should be born whose name Columba should be announced in every province of the isles, and brilliantly should he enlighten the last ages of the earth." So that the Irish were expecting Columba and were prepared to greet him as a prophet.[1]

While Eithne was awaiting the birth of her son she dreamt one night that an angel appeared to her, bringing a filmy garment, "in which the most beautiful colours of all the flowers seemed to be portrayed." She held it reverently in her hands, marvelling at its beauty, but in a little while the angel took it from her, and spreading it out on his arms, let the soft breeze fill it out and bear it gently away. Looking up, Eithne saw it expanding till "its measurement was larger than mountains or forests." She was sad at losing it, but the angel comforted her, telling her she was about to become the mother of a son who should "blossom for heaven and be of so beautiful a character that he should be reckoned among his own people as one of the prophets of God who should lead innumerable souls to the heavenly country." (III. ii.)[2]

The child was baptized by the name *Columba*, a

[1] Local legend tells us that on the night on which he was born, Columba's mother lay on a stone slab beside Gartan Lough: the slab is still shown and is credited with preserving whosoever sleeps on it from the anguish of home-sickness. And so, Irish emigrants, before leaving their native land would spend a night on the stone of Gartan. The superstition arose from the fact that Columba forsook his native land to go about his Master's business, and knowing the bitterness of exile, would comfort and bless those who had to suffer it.

[2] Such reference numbers throughout the book refer to Adamnan's *Life of Columba*, Reeves' edition.

dove, but there is a tradition that another name was bestowed on him, that of *Crimthann*, a wolf. The fitness of this second name cannot be denied, for by his gentleness alone, Columba could never have achieved his aims; the strength, and at times even the roughness of his character were as necessary to the accomplishment of his work as the gentleness of the dove.

The baptism took place at Temple Douglas, between Letterkenny and Gartan, and the ceremony was performed by a Presbyter called Cruithnechan. The suffix *cille, of the cell* or *of the church*, was afterwards added to Columba's name, because as a boy he would often wander away from his playmates to the quiet church, where he would be found lost in thought or prayer. The neighbouring children used to say among themselves, "Has our little Colum come to-day from the church?" and so in the old manuscripts he is generally called *Columcille*.

Columba had one brother, Eoghan, and three sisters, but we hear nothing about their childhood with Columba because he was sent at an early age to be the foster-child of Cruithnechan. This system of fosterage was part of the social system of Ireland at the time; it was no loose arrangement, but was governed by definite laws. It might be undertaken either for affection or for payment, which was generally made in land but sometimes in cows, from three cows for the son of a humble chief to thirty cows for the son of a king. (The fee for girls was higher than that for boys.) It was considered a high honour to have the child of a King as fosterling, and there were no doubt many claimants for the honour of fostering Columba; the priest was chosen because the boy was destined for the Church.

Cruithnechan was one of those learned priests who prepared boys for the monastic schools which had lately been established in Ireland. His own little school was at Doire-Eithne, a hamlet lying in the beautiful valley through which the Leanen, a wild

mountain torrent, rushes down on its way to the plain. We know that Columba was happy, for he afterwards founded a church there in memory of his boyhood, and it was then no doubt that the name of the place was changed to Cill-mac-Nenan to commemorate the sons of Enan, one of Columba's sisters.

Columba would learn to write at this school, for letters had succeeded the Ogham system of lines and points even before Christianity came to Ireland. "Now when the time for reading came to him," says the old Irish *Life*, "the cleric went to a certain prophet (probably a Druid) . . . to ask when the boy ought to begin. When the prophet had scanned the sky, 'Write an alphabet for him now,' he said. The alphabet was written in a cake. And Columb Cille consumed the cake in this wise, half to the east of a water and half to the west of a water. Said the prophet, 'So shall this child's territory be, half to the east of the sea and half to the west of the sea, that is in Ireland.'"

Thus early in life was Columba brought into touch with Druid methods of divining the future from the powers of nature.

The early Irish teachers seem to have understood the soundest principles of education. In the absence of books they wrote poems which the children learned by heart and in which knowledge was presented in an attractive form, the rhymes helping the children's memory. The teachers were aware, too, that the children had to be encouraged in their work if good results were to be obtained, for an old Irish MS. records that it was the custom of good teachers "to praise the understanding of the pupils that they might love what they heard." Columba seems to have been further advanced in learning than the average boy of his age, for one day when Cruithnechan faltered in the 119th Psalm, Columba was able to take it up and repeat it to the end, though his master was unaware that the boy had learnt the Psalms and had not expected it of him.

When he was old enough Columba was sent to the monastic school of Moville at the head of Strangford Lough. There he was under the charge of that St Finnian who had brought the monastic ideal to Ireland from Ninian's *Candida Casa*. Finnian was a cultured man, a scholar and a traveller who delighted in the unfolding genius of his new pupil. Moville was one of many schools which had sprung up all over Ireland in connection with the monasteries; even the early churches founded by St Patrick had schools attached to them for the training of young men who intended to enter the Church. With the spread of monasticism in the beginning of the sixth century—and possibly with the advent of learned men of Gaul obliged to flee their own country—the schools multiplied exceedingly. Many of them were very large: 3000 students is the traditional number in the old Irish *Annals*: the monastic schools of Clonard, Bangor, and Clonfert are all said to have had 3000 students at one time, the students sitting round on grassy slopes so that hundreds could hear the lectures. The education in these schools was the best possible for the time; they were the universities of Ancient Ireland, and they were worthy of their country. Dr Richey, in his *History of the Irish People*, says the Irish schools were undoubtedly in advance of any schools existing on the Continent, and the "lists of books possessed by some of the teachers prove that their institutions embraced a considerable course of classical learning." Many of these schools might be staffed by the fugitive scholars of Gaul, and the founders of monasteries at that time were all outstanding men, most of whom had travelled on the Continent and were ahead of the times. By the eighth century Ireland was the most learned country in Europe, *insula sanctorum et doctorum*.

We can determine with some certitude the education Columba received at Moville. The subjects taught included the classics, divinity, philosophy, general literature, and science so far as it was then known.

Latin was taught even to the youngest scholars and continued right through the curriculum. There were no text-books; the scholars had to begin at once to read Latin authors, but they had a manuscript copy before them on which the teacher had written translations of the most difficult words and sentences. Latin was not then a dead language, it was spoken in the schools; many of the early Irish MS. were written in Latin, and Columba himself wrote both Latin and Irish and left poems in both languages. There were degrees for the students to attain just as there are in our modern universities, though the system of competitive examination seems happily to have been unknown. The degrees were called the Seven Degrees of Wisdom: the first step was conferred on the youth who had read all his Psalms in Latin; he was then led through five intermediary stages to the seventh degree of *Ollamh*, Doctor, or *Sai Litre*, Professor of Literature.

We have, unfortunately, no particulars of Columba's life at Moville except that he was ordained deacon before he left and that there was a real bond of affection between him and Finnian. Both were of scholarly temperament: the master welcomed the eager mind of the student, while Columba felt the reverence of youth for a much-loved teacher. Although in after years Columba's will was to clash with Finnian's, yet before Finnian's death they were reconciled and Finnian was one of the first to recognize the great destiny that lay before his student.

From Moville Columba turned his face southwards to Leinster, where he lived for some time under the tutelage of a Christian bard called Gemman. Now the bards of Ancient Ireland were not only poets, they were learned men, versed in the language and literature of Ireland as well as in her history. Columba was "one of the minstrels of the national poetry of Ireland"; but though his love of beauty and romance and his gift of poetic expression influenced him all his life and were among the chief features of his personality,

he and his tutor would study other things besides poetry.

It was while staying with Gemman that one of the first of Columba's so-called miracles took place. Gemman and Columba were reading in the open air one day when a girl rushed up to them and tried to shelter in the folds of their voluminous cloaks from a wicked man who threatened her. But he dragged her away from the clerics and killed her before their eyes. Columba declared that at the very moment the soul of the girl ascended to heaven the soul of the murderer should go down to hell, and no sooner had he spoken than the man fell dead. As we shall see later the Christian priests were expected to perform miracles to hold their own against the Druid priests, and this " miracle " of Columba's established his power to avenge the innocent and punish the guilty. (It seems probable that Columba constituted himself the instrument of Divine Justice.)[1] Adamnan assures us that " the news of this terrible vengeance was soon spread abroad through many districts of Ireland, and with it the wonder and fame of the holy deacon."

Columba received his final training in the monastic life at Clonard, whither he had been attracted by the fame of another St Finnian: so that the monastic ideal came to Columba through both its chief sources in Ireland, for Finnian of Moville had studied at the *Candida Casa* and Finnian of Clonard had sat at the feet of the Saints of Wales. There is a tradition that after Finnian had learned all that David, Cadoc, and Gildas could teach him, a desire seized him to go to Rome. . . . " But an angel of God came to him and said, ' What would be given to thee at Rome shall be given to thee here. Arise and renew sound doctrine in Ireland.' " For both the Finnians when they returned to Ireland after their foreign training found they had not only to complete the conversion of pagan Ireland,

[1] O'Donnell's *Life* concedes that the murderer died " through the curse of Columcille."

but to strengthen and reform the professedly Christian church.

Finnian of Clonard was a learned man, one of the first of that succession of Irish scholars who made Ireland famous all over Europe. Of his great monastery at Clonard nothing now remains, a little hamlet on the sources of the river Boyne is all that marks the site. But although there is no trace of the early settlement the mind conjures up a picture of the great institution —a little town in itself—which was founded there in the beginning of the sixth century. The early tradition tells us that 3000 students lived there, attracted from Britain and the Continent by the fame of the great Tutor of Saints. These youths, eager for knowledge, and especially for religious knowledge, afterwards swept forth as a great wave of religious enthusiasm over the whole continent of Europe. Ireland was then "glittering with saints who were as numerous as the stars of Heaven."

The Irish monastic system was tribal like the whole structure of Irish society at that time. The monasteries differed slightly from each other, as the Rule for each was written by its own Abbot, but the discipline was severe in all: it demanded unquestioning obedience from the monks; and as the community supported itself by manual labour there was no time for idleness.

When Columba arrived at Clonard he asked Finnian where he should build his hut. "Make it in front of the church," was the answer. The church and the college were big wooden buildings in the centre of the settlement, surrounded by clusters of little huts or booths in which the scholars lived, only a very few living in the college itself. Many of the students, like Columba, built their own huts when they came, but those who were very poor were boarded free by the farmers and wealthy landowners round about. Sometimes the richer scholars had their less fortunate fellows living with them, the latter would take charge of the hut and wait on their rich friends as a return for board

and lodging. We can picture Clonard then, as a little town peopled entirely by those connected with the college.

Columba helped St Finnian with the services of the church, studying at the same time under his guidance and spending much time in transcribing the sacred books, one of the chief occupations of the monks. There were few copies of the Scriptures, and it was the duty of the monastic schools to multiply them in order that each church might have its own copy. " Diligence in writing " was one of Columba's chief characteristics at this time. But he also did his share of the practical work of the community. The students took it in turn to grind the corn with a hand quern for the next day's bread and Columba's corn was so quickly ground that his companions suspected his guardian angel helped him.[1] For Columba was regarded with jealousy by some of his fellow-students : his royal birth, his distinction as a scholar, his reputation for holiness and his growing fame as a worker of miracles set him to some extent above his companions. One of them called Ciaran, a hot-headed Irishman like Columba himself, was irritated at the foremost place Columba occupied in the college on account of his many gifts. But while Ciaran was fuming with jealousy one day, an angel laid an axe, a plane, and an augur before him saying, " Look at these tools ! Remember that these are all thou hast sacrificed for God since thy father was only a carpenter. But Columba has sacrificed the sceptre of Ireland which might have come to him by right of birth ! "

Eleven of Columba's fellow-students at Clonard were men of outstanding personality and character,

[1] The Gaels believed that every person was attended by a good or a bad angel : during sleep the soul of the good man, accompanied by his good angel, ascended to the gates of heaven to foresee the bliss awaiting the good and brave ; while the soul of the bad man, led by his bad angel, descended to the gates of hell to listen to the groans of the wicked. See Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, ii. 333.

but Columba himself was easily the first of this band of eager, romantic youths—" their heads full of dreams, their pockets of little but their own poems." Of these *Twelve Apostles of Ireland,* Ciaran founded the great monastery of Clonmacnois, overcame his jealousy, and was one of Columba's greatest friends ; Brendan, the Sailor-Monk who set out on a Seven Years' Pilgrimage to seek for the Land of Promise, was the founder of Clonfert ; another Brendan founded the monastery of Birr and visited Columba in Scotland ; Mobhi Clairenach left Clonard before Columba and founded the monastic school of Glasnevin beside the clear waters of the Finglass ; Cainnech of Aghaboe visited Columba at Iona and founded many churches in Scotland. Comgall of Bangor (Co. Down) was also at Clonard ; he visited Columba at Iona and travelled over Scotland with him, but his name does not appear in all the lists of the Twelve Saints of Ireland.

We do not know how many years Columba stayed at Clonard, but he left there an ordained priest. Just before he left, Finnian had a vision disclosing his student's future greatness. Finnian saw two moons in the sky, one of silver, the other of gold. " The golden moon went into the north of the island, and Ireland and Scotland gleamed thereby. The silvery moon went on till it stayed by the Shannon and Ireland at her centre gleamed. That was Columcille with the grace of his noble kin and his wisdom, and Ciaran with the refulgence of his virtues and his good deeds. . . ."

Finnian wished Columba to become his domestic Bishop that he might discharge episcopal functions in the monastery, and sent him to Bishop Etchen in Meath to be consecrated. When Columba arrived at Bishop Etchen's church, he was tired with his journey, and sitting down under a tree he asked where the Bishop was.

" There he is," said a certain man, " in the field where they are ploughing below."

" I think," said Columcille, " that it is not meet for

us that a ploughman should confer orders on us; but let us test him."

They then approached him and when they asked for his plough, he gave it to them immediately and the oxen continued to plough notwithstanding. The Bishop's friends said, "The cleric is a good man," but Columcille replied, "Let him be tested further." He then asked for the furrow-ox; Bishop Etchen gave it to him and commanded a stag which was in the wood to come and draw the plough instead. Columcille was satisfied and going up to the Bishop told him what he had come for. "It shall be done," said he. But it was only the order of the priesthood Etchen conferred on Columba, who reproached him—"I regret," said he, "that thou hast conferred this order upon me, but I shall never change it while I live; for this reason, however, no person shall ever again come to have orders conferred upon him in this church."

One feels on reading this curious story that Columba went out of his way in making the Bishop prove himself, just because he had been found ploughing, probably a common enough occupation for a Bishop in those days. The Bishop might naturally feel annoyed with a young candidate for demanding those tests, and it may have been as punishment that he only conferred the rank of the priesthood upon him, a rank which Columba already held. The legend is taken to explain why so great a man as Columba never rose to Episcopal rank. It may be that for political reasons it was not desirable that he should become a Bishop, for there was already much jealousy of this young priest, who was related to most of the provincial kings and might conceivably rise some day to be himself ruler of Ireland. Another explanation is that Columba shrank from accepting the exalted rank of Bishop. He never allowed any of his Abbots to become Bishops,[1] and it is possible that he felt—like many other great men—that exalted earthly

[1] The position of the Bishops in the Columban Church was peculiar, as we shall see in Chapter VII., p. 73.

rank was not in keeping with the life of a true follower of the Carpenter of Nazareth.

But as he had not been made a Bishop, there was no office open to Columba at Clonard ; in any case he was a pioneer, and he was eager to be off on his own business. He left Clonard and went to Glasnevin, the newly-founded monastery of Mobhi Clairenach, where his fellow-students Cainnech, Comgall and Ciaran had preceded him. They stayed there together for some time, studying and debating as to the best means of spreading the Gospel throughout the country. Their studies were rudely interrupted by an outbreak of plague which scattered the community to the four winds. It was soon after this that Columba set out, his apprenticeship being over, on the work of his life.

Adamnan does not say much about the youth of his Saint, but he tells us how, from his boyhood, Columba " was brought up in the discipline of the Christian Faith and in the study of wisdom ; and preserving through the grace of God, the integrity of his body and the purity of his soul, though dwelling upon the earth, he proved himself fitted for the heavenly life. For he was angelic in appearance, graceful in speech, holy in deed, excellent in ability, great in counsel. . . . Not even the space of a single hour could he ever spend without devoting himself either to prayer, reading, or writing, or to some other similar work. He was so occupied day and night, without the slightest intermission, in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching, that the burden of each of these austerities seemed beyond the possibility of human endurance. And still in these he was beloved by all, always exhibiting in his countenance that holy cheerfulness with which the joy of the Holy Ghost was gladdening his inmost soul." (*Second Preface.*)

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY FOUNDATIONS IN IRELAND: THE MIRACLES

COLUMBA was now twenty-five years of age, of immense physical strength and mental energy, and for the next fifteen years he travelled over the length and breadth of Ireland, teaching, preaching, and founding churches and monasteries wherever he went. It is claimed that he founded thirty-seven monasteries in Ireland alone, and certainly his labours were unceasing.

The ancient tradition of the oak-groves being holy ground seems to have weighed with Columba, for it was in a clearing of a vast forest of oak trees that he established his first monastery about the year 545. In choosing his site it was natural that Columba should think of a place near his own home. He was fond of Derry, the *Place-of-Oaks*, which was not thirty miles from Gartan Lough, by whose waters he first saw the light, but although Aedh the King of Ireland offered him a fort there for his monastery, Columba at first refused it because Mobhi Clairenach held ecclesiastical jurisdiction over that district. "But as Columcille was coming out of the fort, he met two of Mobhi's monks, who told him their Master had just died, and they brought his girdle to Columcille as a sign that he might take possession of the land. So Columcille took the land and thus founded his church at Derry." The site of the monastery lay on rising ground in a bend of the river Foyle, protected from attack by marshy ground. And Columba could see the sea from it; all his life long he felt the call of the sea; he wrote of launching forth on the foam-white sea, of the delight of rowing his little coracle round the shore, of

gazing out over the briny deep from the oaken deck of his barque. And this comradeship with the sea he passed on to his monks, teaching them to "love the roar and thunder of the waves . . . a training which stood them in good stead when they sailed away into unknown Scottish seas."

Columba watched over the monastery at Derry as the apple of his eye; he superintended every detail of the life of the little community, the housing, the feeding, the education and the training of his young monks. Baithene, his cousin and foster-son, who became his chief deputy at Iona, was his disciple at Derry, and most of his monks, owing to the tribal system of the monasteries, were of his own kin. Every tree in the great oak forest which sheltered the monastery was dear to him: his church could not be built with its chancel towards the east, because that would have entailed felling some of the oaks, and he never allowed an oak to be cut down. "Those which fell by natural decay, or were struck down by the wind, were alone made use of for the fire which was lighted on the arrival of strangers, or were distributed to the neighbouring poor. The poor had a first right in Ireland, as everywhere else, to the goods of the monks, and the monastery of Derry fed a hundred applicants every day."[1] O'Donnell, writing of Columba's affection for his oak trees, puts this curious little stave in his mouth:

> Though I am affrighted, truly
> By death and by Hell,
> I am more affrighted frankly
> By the sound of an axe in Derry in the West.

Many years later, when Columba had left Ireland and was living in Iona, his thoughts often turned to Derry, which was ever near his heart. When he lay dying and was making his last dispositions, "My soul to Derry," he said. Some verses have come down to us, not perhaps in the exact form in which he left them,

[1] Montalembert, *op. cit.*, iii. 112.

but expressing what was in his mind—the outpourings of a soul far from its native land, for which it longs with a passion that demands expression.

Were all the tribute of Scotia mine,
From its midland to its borders,
I would give all for one little cell
In my beautiful Derry.
For its peace and for its purity,
For the white angels that go
In crowds from one end to the other.
I love my beautiful Derry
For its quietness and its purity,
For heaven's angels that come and go,
Under every leaf of the oaks,
I love my beautiful Derry.
My Derry, my fair oak-grove,
My dear little cell and dwelling,
Oh God in the heavens above!
Let him who profanes it be cursed.
Beloved are Durrow and Derry,
Beloved is Raphoe the pure,
Beloved the fertile Drumhone,
Beloved are Sords and Kells.

But sweeter and fairer to me
The salt sea where the sea-gulls cry
When I come to Derry from far,
It is sweeter and dearer to me,
Sweeter to me.

Of the other monasteries Columba mentions in these lines, Durrow or Dearmach, the Plain-of-Oaks, was for a time the most important of all his foundations. Columcille's cross and his well are still to be seen there, but were probably so named in his memory and date from later times. Durrow was also famous for a manuscript copy of the Gospels said to be in the handwriting of Columba, and of which we shall hear more in the next chapter.

Raphoe was not far from Gartan, but even there, near the home of his boyhood, the prophet was not without honour. It was at Raphoe that he "brought

to life a wright who had been drowned in a mill-pond," and that when his household lacked a ploughshare, "he blessed the hands of a little boy who was biding with him, and he made the share and was skilful in smithwork thenceforth through Columba's blessing."

Drumhone, sometimes called Drumcliff-of-the-Crosses, is in Sligo; Sords is seven miles from Dublin—"there he marked out a well, named *Sord*, that is *pure*, and sained a cross. For it was his wont to make crosses and writing tablets and book-satchels and other church gear."

Kells, in Meath, was specially marked out by Columcille, who prophesied that it should become his loftiest cloister on earth, "although it would not be there his resurrection would be. . . ." This prophecy was fulfilled, for after Columba's death, when his monks were driven from Iona by Scandinavian pirates, Kells became the headquarters of the Columban monks who founded there "a new city of Columcille." Kells is most generally known for its illuminated copy of the Gospels, which used to be ascribed to Columba, but probably dates from the eighth century. For much as Columba loved the work of the scribe, he was an active missionary, constantly travelling about, founding new churches and monasteries, strengthening those which already existed and deeply engaged with diplomatic and political concerns. He could not have had time to make such a copy of the Gospels as the Book of Kells; it was in order to possess the teaching of the Sacred Book that he practised the art of the scribe, not because of the delicate curves and rich colours of the illuminated text: these also appealed to him, but the art of illumination was not brought to the perfection of the Book of Kells till long after Columba had been laid in his grave.

Columba's early life in Ireland was a happy one, for although the chiefs and kings waged ceaseless warfare against one another, they all respected the monks who were allowed to travel the island unmolested. The

chiefs even sent a tithe of their plunder to the monasteries, to atone perhaps for the robbery they had committed.

Columba was well known on the islands round the Irish coast: he lived for a time on Aran-of-the-Saints, off Galway Bay, and there also left a church. There is a legend that he discovered on the island the grave of an Abbot of Jerusalem, who had come from the East to visit Enda of Aran, and had died there. Some of Columba's foundations were in remote glens like that of Glen Columkille in the extreme west of Ulster, where ruins of a monastic settlement are still to be seen. There are curious legends about his early foundations in Ireland: he once asked the chief of Tory Island for as much land as his cowl would cover, and when the chief granted this reasonable request, Columba's cowl grew and grew till it covered nearly the whole island. That story is probably borrowed from folk-lore, for the heroes of folk-tales often gained their ends by trickery; in any case there are many more credible legends about the young Columba. He had a guardian angel who often appeared to him and was even seen with him by those of supernatural vision. One day this angel asked him which virtues he most longed to possess. Columba chose wisdom, prophecy and chastity, and soon afterwards—according to the legend—three lovely maidens appeared and would have embraced him. But Columba frowned and pushed them away. "What!" they cried. "Dost thou not know us? We are three sisters whom our Father gives thee as thy brides!"

"Who is your father?" asked Columba. "Our Father is God, he is Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour of the world," they answered, "and our names are Virginity, Wisdom and Prophecy. We have come to leave thee no more, to love thee with an incorruptible love."

This story is a good example of the method of the early writers, who, not being skilled in the drawing of

character, invented an incident to illustrate every characteristic of the hero they wished to draw attention to: in this case O'Donnell (or his scribe) has transformed the three virtues Columba wished for, into three lovely maidens, and throughout the early *Lives* of the Saint we have to deal with this form of tradition "which translates dreams into visions, and allegory and proverb into actual incident." [1]

It was probably because of the halo of romance and sanctity that was woven round Columba from his birth and before it, that even as a youth miracles were attributed to him. Some readers may feel this atmosphere of miracle, in which his life is enveloped, a difficulty in appreciating his character. But we ought not to make too much of that, for it is characteristic of the age he lived in and could hardly have been otherwise. It has been thought a strange thing that a growth of miraculous legend should spring up so quickly around a well-known personality, so that a century after his death—by the time Adamnan's *Life* was written—the true outlines are obscured by this parasitical growth which has laid hold of it and sought to cover it up. But it was the standing belief of the church in the early centuries that she possessed miraculous powers. Irenæus, writing in the beginning of the third century, tells us that "those who are in truth Christian disciples receive grace from Him to perform works promoting the welfare of other men according to the gift each one has received from Him. Some do certainly and truly drive out devils. Others heal the sick by laying their hands on them. Yea, even the dead have been raised up and have remained among us for many years. It is not possible to number the gifts the Church has received from Christ and which she exercises day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles."

And the gifts residing in the Church were expected to be present in a marked degree in every eminent

[1] O'Kelleher, Introduction, American ed., O'Donnell, xxiv.

teacher or leader. Every Saint was expected to perform miracles. We must remember the infancy of medical science at that time and reflect how a strong personality could work on those weaker than himself even to the extent of restoring life to those who appeared to be dead. Columba worked many marvellous cures, most probably by the method now called psycho-therapy, though he called it the power of God, and hailed every cure as a tribute to his God and an additional argument for the conversion of the heathen to the new faith. He was consciously following the example of Christ when He told the sick man of Capernaum to take up his bed and walk. St Hypatius of Asia Minor in the fifth century had cured the sick by bidding them get up and go to their work as if there was nothing wrong with them: similar cures are not unknown in our own day though we no longer call them miracles. Adamnan seems to have thought that in order to prove Columba a Saint, miracles were needful. Such a *Life*, in these days, had to include its quota of miracles, otherwise the patent of canonization could not be taken out. Also, as Adamnan's *Life* would probably be read aloud at meals in the refectory, edifying tales were welcome, to stimulate the monks. And the early Christians of Ireland still believed in miracles to which their minds had been accustomed by centuries of Druid superstition and ritual; in order to dislodge the Druids from their commanding position, the Christian missionaries had to beat them with their own weapons. Columba's miracles are a strong instance of the working of the general belief that a Saint could do and must do such things, but in whatever way we regard them, they serve to show the implicit faith the people had in him: they thought him capable of working miracles; they called him "The Angel of the Lord" and believed him to live on a higher plane than they did. Many of Columba's so-called "miracles" can be explained by natural causes: in any case we cannot afford to discard them—they are invaluable

because of the indirect light they throw on his character and on the life and beliefs of his time.

But Columba's story needs no miraculous exaggeration: even in its utmost simplicity, shorn of every legend, it makes us marvel at his achievement.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF CULDREIMHNE

THE decisive event of Columba's life took place when he was about forty years old and at the height of his powers. Mentally and physically he was a very giant among men, of strong, big-boned, active build with a voice "so loud and melodious that it could be heard a mile away. His skin was white, his face broad and fair and radiant, lit up with large, grey, luminous eyes; his large and well-shaped head was crowned, except where he wore his frontal tonsure, with close and curling hair. His voice was clear and resonant . . . yet sweet with more than the sweetness of the bards." [1] A Celt of the Celts, Columba had all the characteristics of that race: he had a kingly courtesy, an eager excitable temperament, and in his early years a love of fighting. His hot temper was easily aroused and was often guilty of carrying him further than his reason would have allowed him to go. There was little repose in the Columba of those days, his wild restlessness represented the wolf-like side of his nature, the fiery impetuosity which bore him forward.

But there was also the other side—the lover of all things beautiful, the bard to whom poetry came as naturally as speech to ordinary mortals; poetry and romance were instinctive with the Celts, and in the history of Irish poetry the name of Ossian is followed by that of Columba.

To this portrait of a forceful personality endowed

[1] *Feilire of Angus*, quoted by Douglas Hyde, *Literary History of Ireland*, p. 173.

with a great gift of poetic expression, we must add the portrait of the scholar and servant of God. Columba was moreover one of the outstanding figures of his time, a marked man for his royal descent, his learning, his holiness, his statesmanship, his power as a warrior and as an ecclesiastic. From his student days he had been a lover of books, and books were rare and precious in his time. He used to go about the country seeking for manuscripts to copy, the only way in those days to secure a book for oneself. To a man with a scholar's mind and instincts we can imagine the mental starvation of that bookless world. We can picture him scouring the country for new manuscripts to read and to copy. And his requests were often refused —the owners of manuscripts were jealous of them and liked to keep them locked up. Then the wrath of the Saint would be aroused! There is a story of a learned recluse called Longarad-of-the-hairy-legs (because his legs were covered with white hair) who possessed several manuscripts. Columba arrived one day and asked if he might examine them. Longarad refused, and thereupon Columba burst forth in fierce invective—"May thy books no longer do thee any good," he exclaimed, "neither to thee nor to those who come after thee, since thou takest occasion by them to show thy inhospitality!"

About this time Finnian of Moville had just returned from a journey to Italy. When he left Rome to return to Ireland, Pope Pelagius presented him with several gifts which are not specified, but tradition tells us that Finnian returned to Ireland "over the swelling sea, bringing with him beautiful copies of the sacred books." And according to an early Irish Martyrology "it was Findia that first brought the whole Gospel into Ireland." Finnian was, at any rate, famous in Ireland for his beautiful books, and it is practically certain that there was among them a copy of St Jerome's translation of the Scriptures which was by that time being used in Rome although it had not yet penetrated to Ireland.

As far as we can reconstruct the story, this is what happened.[1]

Columba, who had a real affection for Finnian, went to visit his old master on his return from abroad to hear the latest news of Rome and of Europe, and he naturally asked Finnian for permission to read the precious books he had brought back with him. We can imagine the anxiety of the student to examine the new version of the Holy Book, something more accurate than the old Latin translation with which up till then he had had to be content. But Finnian, too, was jealous about showing his books, and it was only because he knew Columba's scholarship to be worthy of the privilege that he allowed him access to the manuscript.

—But Columba becomes deeply engrossed in the new version. He feels he must have a copy of it for himself, that he may have it by him to study at his leisure. And so he begins, secretly, to copy it. He does not ask Finnian's permission because he knows it will be refused, and that if he even suggests it, Finnian will lock the manuscript away from him altogether.

The manuscript was kept in the church, it was probably used at the church services, and after Mass and Office were over, Columba remained in the church unknown to Finnian to transcribe the text. And here the ancient chronicler has been unable to refrain from introducing a miracle—one which appears in the lives of several Saints—" At night time while engaged in that transcription, the fingers of his right hand were as candles which shone like five very bright lamps, whose light filled the entire church. On the last night when Colum Cille was completing the transcription of that book, Finnian sent for it. When the messenger arrived at the door of the church, he was astonished at the

[1] This story has been the subject of a vast amount of research : many explanations have been suggested both by ancient and modern historians. The following account gives the results of the latest theories.

great light he saw within, and a great fear seized him. Timorously he glanced through a hole which was in a valve of the door of the church, and when he beheld Colum Cille . . . he dared not address him nor demand the book of him. It was revealed to Colum Cille, however, that the youth was thus watching him, whereat he became very angry, and addressing a pet crane of his said: 'If God permits, you have my permission to pluck out that youth's eyes, who came to observe me without my knowledge.' With that the crane immediately went and drove its beak through the hole of the valve towards the youth's eye, plucked it out and left it resting on his cheek. The youth then returned to Finnian and related to him the whole of his adventure. (Cranes were usual pets at that time, and the Irish monks allowed them to make their home in the churches.) Thereupon Finnian was displeased and sained the youth's eye, so that it was as well as ever and without being injured or affected in any way."[1]

Finnian was angry that Columba had abused his trust and dared to copy the manuscript without his permission. He went to Columba and reproved him, claiming that the copy belonged to the owner of the book. But Columba was not lightly to relinquish his treasure. He replied that he would appeal to Diarmit, High-King of Ireland, for a judgment on the case; and on Finnian agreeing to that, they set out together for Tara-of-the-Kings in Leinster. The love of Finnian and Columba for each other has been held to make this story improbable: it is in fact so improbable that no writer would have invented it.

When the two ecclesiastics arrived before Diarmit—who was descended like Columba from Niall of the Nine Hostages—Finnian as the elder told the story.

[1] These extracts from the old Irish *Life*, compiled by Manus O'Donnell in 1532, are quoted from Dr Lawlor's paper on *The Cathach of St Columba* in the proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xxxiii. p. 292.

"Colum Cille transcribed my book, without my knowledge," he said: "I maintain that the transcript belongs to me!"

"But I hold," said Colum Cille, "that Finnian's book has not decreased in value because of the transcript I made from it; also that it is not right to extinguish the divine things it contained, or to prevent me or anybody else from copying it, or reading it, or circulating it throughout the provinces. I further maintain that if I benefited by its transcription, which I desired to be for the general good, provided no injury accrued to Finnian or his book thereby, it was quite permissible for me to copy it!"

But Diarmit gave judgment according to the Brehon[1] law:—

"To every cow her calf, to every book its transcript. Therefore the copy you have made, O Colum Cille, belongs to Finnian."

At this Colum Cille rose up in his wrath. "It is a wrong judgment," he said, "and you shall be punished for it!"

This incident in itself would have been enough to provoke Columba's passionate nature to revenge, but something else happened immediately afterwards which still further incensed him. Staying at Tara at that time was a son of the King of Connacht, called Curnan, who was detained as hostage for his father. One day the youth was taking part in a hurling match,[2] and in the course of the game he and another player had a difference of opinion. Curnan, in a sudden fit of rage, struck his opponent a blow on the head with his hurley "so that he fell down dead." Curnan fled to Columba as a representative of the Church and asked for his protection, but Diarmit's men sought

[1] In ancient Ireland a judge was called a Brehon, and so early Irish law is called the Brehon Law.

[2] The game of hurley seems to have resembled hockey. It was played with a leather-covered ball four inches in diameter, each player having an ash-wood hurley about 3 feet long.

him out, dragged him away and put him summarily to death.

Columba could restrain himself no longer. Diarmit's judgment on the question of the book was still rankling, but now his right of sanctuary had been violated, and this was one of the most sacred obligations of ancient Ireland, absolute and inviolable. It applied to a place as a rule, the immediate precincts of the castle of a chief or King could be so regarded, but the Church's right of sanctuary was the more absolute that the ground which offered safety was holy ground. And Columba was a noted ecclesiastic: his immediate neighbourhood seemed to Curnan holy ground which should have afforded sanctuary. Columba evidently thought so too; he was incensed that the rights of the Church had been ignored, and vowing vengeance on Diarmit and his followers, he left Tara for the fastnesses of his kinsmen, the provincial Kings of Cinel Conaill and Cinel Eogain.

Sending his followers round by another road, Columba struck off on a solitary path across the mountains. We can follow his thoughts on this lonely journey from the poem he composed as he walked and which has happily come down to us. This *Song of Trust* was used for centuries as a *road safe-guard*,—anyone setting out on a dangerous journey who first repeated this poem would be protected from every misfortune. The early Christians although they condemned the Druid practices of incantations and charms, credited their own Hymns with beneficent powers, thus grafting Christianity on pagan practices.

SONG OF TRUST

Alone am I on the mountain,
O royal Sun! prosper my path
And then I shall have nothing to fear.
Were I guarded by six thousand,
Though they might defend my skin,
When the hour of death is fixed,

Were I guarded by six thousand,
In no fortress could I be safe,
Even in a church the wicked are slain,
Even in an isle amidst a lake ;
But God's elect are safe
Even in the front of battle.
No man can kill me before my day,
Even had we closed in combat ;
And no man can save my life
When the hour of death has come.
My life !
As God pleases let it be ;
Nought can be taken from it,
Nought can be added to it,
The lot which God has given
Ere man dies must be lived out.
He who seeks more, were he a prince,
Shall not a mite obtain.
A guard !
A guard may guide him on his way ;
But can they guard
Against the touch of death ? . . .

Forget thy poverty awhile ;
Let us think of the world's hospitality.
The Son of Mary will prosper thee
And every guest shall have his share.
Many a time
What is spent returns to the bounteous hand,
And that which is kept back,
None the less has passed away.
O living God !
Alas for him who evil works !
That which he thinks not of, comes to him,
That which he hopes, vanishes out of his hand.
There is no Sreod (magic) that can tell our fate,
Nor bird upon the branch
Nor trunk of gnarled oak . . .

Better is he in whom we trust,
The King who has made us all,
Who will not leave me to-night without refuge.
I adore not the voice of birds,
Nor chance, nor the love of a son or a wife.

My Druid is Christ, the Son of God,
The Son of Mary, the Great Abbot,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. . . .[1]

We hear no echo of vindictiveness in these lines: Columba's anger had time to cool on his lonely journey across the mountains; before he arrived at the home of his kinsmen his wrath was calm and reasoned. His anger against Diarmit he felt to be a just anger that required to be avenged, and he represented to his cousins that a slight had been cast upon their tribe, first by the judgment of Diarmit against him and secondly by the murder of Curnan who had asked for his protection: more dreadful even than that was the fact that the Church's right of sanctuary had been violated. Columba was by this time a great figure in the public life of Ireland; his clan were proud of him, jealous of his reputation and of any slight cast upon him, and the Celts were always quick to resent injustice, they were fierce fighters, even the women and the clergy taking part in battle. The tribal passions were aroused: the reason for the battle seemed a just one and so the champions of Columba, the Kings of Cinel Conaill and Cinel Eogain, willingly reinforced by the outraged King of Connacht, armed their hosts against Diarmit the supreme ruler of Ireland.

When all was ready for battle on the morrow, Columba spent the night in fasting and prayer, and while he prayed, the Archangel Michael—according to the legend reported by O'Donnell—appeared to him, and said that in answer to his prayers, he and his side should be victorious, but that because he had asked such a worldly favour, the blessing of the Almighty could not rest on him until he had exiled himself beyond the seas, never to return to Ireland's shores, never to partake of her food and drink, never more to behold her men and women.

[1] The translation is that of Montalembert. The reader will notice references to Druid superstitions and to omens by the aid of which Druids divined the future.

Columba's "prayer" on this occasion was rather an incantation aimed against the Druidical rites of his enemies: but he ends on a surer note:

> My Druid—may he be on my side!—
> Is the Son of God, and Truth with Purity.

In the meantime Finnian had been praying for the victory of Diarmit's army, but when he saw that Columba's prayers were more effective, he stopped his own petitions, in order—according again to O'Donnell—that the victory might speedily go to Columba's side and the slaughter be stopped. It is a strange story, crediting the saints with the power of influencing the Deity in different degrees: it puts Finnian in an invidious position, making him countenance the conduct of Diarmit who was conducting the battle with Druid ritual, marching his host round a cairn sunwise and causing an *airbhe* to be drawn between the two armies. The exact meaning of this *airbhe* is not known, it is sometimes translated as a Druidical fence across which no enemy could pass. Diarmit was nominally a Christian, but by ignoring the Church's right of sanctuary he had arrayed its powers against him with the exception of Finnian; it no doubt seemed wise, as he had alienated the Christians, to see what the gods of the Druids could do.

On the morning of the battle, the Archangel Michael, armed as a warrior with shield and sword, was seen to lead Columba's host. Diarmit was utterly defeated, leaving 3000 men dead on the field, while of the victorious army only one man was killed and that because he had disobeyed the injunction of the Archangel and had crossed over the Druid *airbhe*. Seeing that Diarmit fought under the protection of Druid ritual and that Columba was the leading exponent of Christianity in Ireland at that time, the battle may have been regarded as a test of power between Druidism and Christianity. Columba's kinsmen believed the victory to be due to his prayers, and they had a silver shrine made for the

Cathach or Battle Psalter, the *casus belli*: in all future battles of the tribe, this shrine and its precious contents were carried before the army.[1]

[1] O'Donnell's *Life* gives us a few particulars about this manuscript. "The Cathach (*i.e.* the Fighter, the Psalter of Battle) indeed is the name of the book on account of which the battle was fought. It is Colum Cille's chief relic in the land of Cinel Conaill. It is encased in silver and it is not lawful to open it. And if it be taken thrice right-handwise round the host of Cinel Conaill when about to engage in battle, they always return safe in triumph. It is on the bosom of a Co-arb or Cleric, who is as far as possible free from mortal sin, that it should be borne round the host."

The shrine or Cumdach referred to, was made for the precious relic about the end of the 11th century, by order of the head of the clan O'Donnell of which Columba was a member. It is a beautiful silver shrine overlaid with gold and strengthened inside with brass plates.

The book which Columba copied was possibly the copy of Jerome's translation of the Psalter, which is now in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, a fragment "consisting of fifty-eight consecutive leaves all of which are more or less mutilated." I quote from the account of the Cathach given by Rev. J. H. Lawlor in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, XXXIII. pp. 241-443. Professor W. M. Lindsay, who furnishes a paleographical note, states that "there seems to be no valid reason why we should refuse to the Cathach the early date which Dr Lawlor's theory assigns to it. Further, that the nature of the script is in keeping with the theory, for it is a half-uncial script reduced in size and made more flowing. In other words, the formal book-hand of the time seems to have been modified so as to enable the writer to get through his task more quickly and to use less parchment."

Dr Lawlor has established a strong case in favour of the theory that Columba also copied the Gospels from Jerome's *Vulgate*, in the possession of Finnian of Moville, and that this original copy, written in a small rapid hand, was for long in the possession of Columba's monastery at Durrow, where it was later transcribed into the elaborately illuminated copy now known as the *Book of Durrow*, which bears the following inscription:—

"I pray thy blessedness, O holy Presbyter St Patrick, that whosoever shall take this book into his hands may remember

Columba and his allies had won the battle, but it was to have far-reaching consequences for him. The priests and saints of Ireland were already jealous of his powers, his position, and his success. They convoked a Synod at Teltown in Meath, at which Columba was formally accused of having caused the death of the 3000 warriors slain in battle on his behalf. Before he could arrive to defend himself, sentence of excommunication was passed against him. Adamnan gives us an account of what subsequently happened. He does not admit that his hero had been guilty of wrong, and glossing over the cause, he goes on to relate how Brendan of Birr, when he saw Columba approaching, " quickly arose and with head bowed down, reverently kissed him. Some of the seniors of that assembly found fault with him saying, ' Why didst thou not decline to rise in presence of an excommunicated person, and to kiss him ? ' Brendan replied, ' If you had seen what the Lord has this day thought fit to show to me regarding this his chosen one whom you dishonour, you would never have excommunicated a person whom God not only doth not excommunicate, according to your unjust sentence, but ever more and more highly esteemeth.'

" ' How, we would wish to know,' they asked, ' doth God exalt, as thou sayest, one whom we have excommunicated, not without reason ? '

" ' I have seen,' said Brendan, ' a most brilliant pillar wreathed with fiery tresses, preceding this same man of God whom you treat with contempt. I have also seen holy angels accompanying him on his journey through the plain. Therefore do I not dare to slight

the writer Columba. I wrote this gospel for my own use in the space of twelve days, by the grace of our Lord."

Following this inscription there is an addition, probably by an Abbot of Durrow to the effect that he had transcribed it from the original written by the hand of Columba. All the arguments for this theory are fully set forth by Dr Lawlor and Professor Lindsay in the paper above referred to.

him whom I see foreordained by God to be the leader of his people to life.' When he had said this, they desisted and so far from daring to hold the saint excommunicated, they even treated him with the greatest respect and reverence." (iii. 4.)

The synod accordingly revoked the sentence of excommunication, but charged Columba instead to win as many souls for Christ as had fallen in the battle fought on his behalf. It is difficult to say whether Columba was penitent. He certainly felt sorrow for the loss of life, but he did not feel it had been caused by any fault of his—"I am not responsible," he said, "it was the unjust judgment passed on me by Diarmit that caused the battle." It was impossible for his proud nature to accept the blame for a fault of which he could not feel himself justly accused—"It was not I who caused it," he would reiterate, "it is hard for a man unjustly provoked to restrain his heart and sacrifice justice!" We must remember that death was lightly regarded in those days; it was no dreadful calamity to die, death was the gateway to life eternal, and death in battle was the noblest death a man could wish for.

But Columba could find no peace. He went restlessly from place to place, seeking the advice of one wise man after another as if his soul was tormented by remorse. He went first to St Molaise, his soul-friend or confessor, at his monastery of Inismurray, an island six miles off the coast of Sligo. Molaise advised him to accept the sentence of the Archangel, and exile himself from Ireland, but on leaving Inismurray Columba sought the advice of another friend who agreed to pray for the souls of those slain at Culdrehmne and was afterwards able to assure him that they "now enjoyed eternal repose." Columba stayed with Enda on the island of Aran about this time, and on leaving it he wrote his *Farewell to Aran*—

> Farewell! a long farewell to thee,
> Oh Aran my sun!
> My heart is in the west with thee.

It is the same to lie beneath thy pure soil
As to be buried in the land of Peter and Paul.
Paradise is with thee,
The Garden of God within the sound of thy bells.
The angels love Aran,
Each day an angel comes there
To join in its services.
Oh Aran my sun !
My love is in the west with thee !

Columba did not accept the sentence of exile in its uncompromising severity : he returned to Ireland in 575 to attend the Synod of Drumceatt, and Adamnan tells us that he visited the island several times from Iona. But the battle of Culdreimhne was no doubt one of the determining factors which led to his leaving Ireland. This is sometimes questioned from the fact that Adamnan merely tells us that Columba undertook his pilgrimage " for the love of Christ." But in those days pilgrimage implied forsaking one's native land in order to live a life of asceticism and austerity—pilgrimage was then a form of penance. Adamnan's constant endeavour is to present his Saint without one blot of human frailty on his record : it is quite possible that he knew the story although he preferred to disregard it.

But there were other reasons which led Columba to leave Ireland. The north coast of Ireland and the west coast of Scotland, or Albyn as it was then called, were now inhabited by the same race. This colony of Irish Gaels or Scots, which had been a Christian colony before it left Ireland, had been in possession of the mainland of Argyll and its adjacent islands, but in 560, Brude mac Mælchon, King of the Northern Picts, inflicted a serious defeat on the colony, which seemed in danger of being swept into the sea and utterly exterminated. One reason for the crushing nature of this defeat was that the colony had become divided into four clans, and had not presented a united front to the onslaughts of the Picts who conquered many of the islands and drove the Scots southwards. Gabhran their King was

killed and they were left at the mercy of King Brude.

Columba was intensely patriotic, and his feeling of clanship was stirred on hearing of these reverses sustained by members of his own race. This was another reason for his coming to Scotland to which three distinct motives now seemed to point him. He had (i.) to fulfil his own sentence, (ii.) to rescue the Scots of Dalriada from the clutches of King Brude and establish their Kingdom firmly in Western Scotland, and (iii.) to attempt the conversion of the northern Picts of Scotland. He was at this time in the full glory of his manhood and saw before him other realms to conquer—"while his missionary zeal impelled him to attempt the conversion of the Picts, he must have felt that if he succeeded in winning a pagan people to the religion of Christ, he would at the same time rescue the Irish colony of Dalriada from a great danger, and render them an important service by establishing peaceable relations between them and their greatly more numerous and powerful neighbours, and replacing them in the more secure possession of the western district they had colonized."[1]

We have one word more to say about Columba before he "wends his way over sea to preach God's word to the men of Scotland." Just before he set sail he went to say farewell to his old master, Finnian of Moville. He had parted from him before the battle, not on the best of terms. But Columba was a great man: there was no smallness in his nature, he was impetuous truly, but he was also generous and able to take large views. He recognized that his attitude to Finnian had hardly been that of a student to a much loved teacher: as Dr Lawlor dryly points out, Columba would have had few friends if he had not possessed "a considerable power of renewing friendships which had been severed for a time." Finnian, on his part, saw his favourite student from whose future he expected much, about to

[1] Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, II., p. 84.

depart on a perilous mission from which he could hardly hope to see him return, for Finnian was now an old man. Taking the air outside his monastery one April night, he saw Columba coming towards him and "observing also an angel of the Lord accompanying him, he said to those of his brethren who were with him, 'Behold! look now to Columba as he draweth near. He hath been deemed worthy of having an angelic inhabitant of Heaven to be his companion on his wanderings!'"

Both Brendan and Finnian had seen Columba's guardian angel; this news spread quickly over Ireland and so softened the hearts of his brother clerics towards him, that it was in the favour of God and man that he and his twelve disciples "fared forth under prosperous sail for Britain."

One of the old Irish poems ascribed to Columba must have been written just before he embarked on this voyage: Dr Douglas Hyde has generously allowed me to quote his beautiful version of it:

COLUMCILLE CECENIT

O, Son of my God, what a pride, what a pleasure
To plough the blue sea!
The waves of the fountain of deluge to measure,
Dear Eiré, to thee.

We are rounding Moy-n-Olurg, we sweep by its head, and
We plunge through Loch Foyle,
Whose swans could enchant with their music the dead, and
Make pleasure of toil.

The host of the gulls come with joyous commotion
And screaming and sport,
I welcome my own "Dewy-Red"[1] from the ocean
Arriving in port.

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[1] Dearg-druchtach—*i.e.* "Dewy Red"—was the name of St Columba's boat.

O Eiré, were wealth my desire, what a wealth were
To gain far from thee,
In the land of the stranger, but there even health were
A sickness to me!

Alas, for the voyage! O high King of Heaven,
Enjoined upon me,
For that I on the red plain of bloody Cooldrevin
Was present to see.

How happy is the son of Dima,[1] no sorrow
For him is designed,
He is having, this hour, round his own hill in Durrow,
The wish of his mind.

The sounds of the winds in the elms, like the strings of
A harp being played,
The note of the blackbird that claps with the wings of
Delight in the glade.

With him in Ross-Grencha [2] the cattle are lowing
At earliest dawn,
On the brink of the summer the pigeons are cooing
And doves on the lawn.

Three things am I leaving behind me, the very
Most dear that I know,
Tir-Leedach [3] I'm leaving, and Durrow and Derry,
Alas, I must go!

Yet my visit and feasting with Comgall have eased me
At Cainneach's right hand,
And all but thy government, Eiré, has pleased me,
Thou waterfall land.

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[1] His friend Cormac, Abbot of Durrow.
[2] Another name for Durrow.
[3] Columba's own people.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARRIVAL AT IONA

Behold Iona!
A blessing on each eye that see-eth it.
ST COLUMBA.

IN the month of May, in the year 563, Columba and his twelve disciples sailed away from Ireland—"In the forty-second year of his age," writes Adamnan, "Columba, resolving to seek a foreign country for the love of Christ, sailed from Scotia to Britain, where he lived for thirty-four years, an island soldier." His twelve disciples were all blood relations, most of them indeed had followed Columba for many years in his wanderings over Ireland. One of the number, young Mochonna, was the son of an Irish King, and Columba spoke earnestly with him of his duty to his father and mother and his native land. But Mochonna was determined to follow his Master "It is thou who art my father!" he replied hotly, "the Church is my mother, and my country is where I can gather the largest harvest for Christ. I swear to follow thee wheresoever thou goest, until thou hast led me to Christ, to whom thou hast consecrated me."

Of the other eleven disciples, Baithene, who succeeded Columba as Abbot of Iona, was his cousin and foster-son: Cobthach was Baithene's brother: Ernan was Columba's uncle and became superior of the monastery on Hinba island of which we shall hear again: Diarmit was Columba's "minister" or attendant, he was constantly with his Master and supported him in his old age even to the end. The names of the other disciples of whom we know nothing individually, were Rus and

Fechno, Scandal, Echoid, Tochannu, Cairnaan and Grilaan. Columba, like most of the saints, took twelve disciples because he liked in all things to follow the Gospel tradition.

Although we have no description of the voyage, we can picture it to ourselves. Columba's destination was so far determined for him that it had to be somewhere from whence he could no longer see the shores of Ireland: it had also to be in a position from which he could protect his kinsmen of Dalriada from the onslaughts of the northern Picts, whom he sought to convert. His choice was therefore limited to some spot on the boundaries of these two territories. And it was traditional among the saints of Ireland, to seek refuge on an island, where seclusion offered them protection from every foe as well as quiet and peace in which to pursue their search after divine things.

No doubts seem to have crossed Columba's mind as to his power to protect his kinsmen or to convert the Picts. And yet he was only one man with twelve followers, setting out to subdue warlike clans, in their northern fastnesses: he was unarmed, he had no surety of finding a resting place on which to establish his settlement. But he set out confidently, believing in his mission, having absolute faith that God would bless it and crown it with success.

It was a frail craft in which Columba and his disciples set sail to cross the stretch of open water that lay between Ireland and Scotland: their *curragh* or coracle consisted of a framework of strong branches laced firmly together by smaller branches, the whole being then covered with fresh hides which were laced to the gunwale with leather thongs: as the hide contracted in drying, the skin became hard and rigid. That form of craft required careful handling although from its very lightness it could live in seas where stouter barques must have perished.[1] The voyagers probably embarked

[1] Similar boats were used on the Spey in Scotland till the end of the 18th century, and may still be found in remote parts of Ireland.

at Derry and steered a northerly course. What Columba's thoughts were as he saw the green hills of Erin sink below the horizon, we can gather from a few lines called the *Song of Farewell*:

How swift is the speed of my coracle;
Its stern turned to Derry;
I grieve at my errand o'er the noble sea,
Travelling to Alba of the ravens.
My foot in my good little coracle,
My sad heart still bleeding:
Weak is the man who cannot lead;
Totally blind are all the ignorant.
A grey eye looks back to Erin,
A grey eye full of tears;
It shall never see again
The men of Erin nor their wives.
While I stand on the deck of my barque
I stretch my vision o'er the briny sea,
Westwards to Erin.

The first land the voyagers touched was Kintyre where Columba visited his cousin Connall who had succeeded Gabhran as King of the Irish colony. Connall was the grandson of Fergus Mor who had led the expedition of Scots to Argyll. On leaving Kintyre the coracle came into the full swell of the Atlantic, but the islands known as the Inner Hebrides lay ahead and soon the mariners sought the shelter of the narrow strait between Islay and Jura where the tides run swiftly between low-lying shores of heather and pasture-land. Why did Columba not land on Islay or Jura, it may be asked? Probably because they were still within sight of Ireland and because they were too large to offer the retirement he wanted for his monastery. On emerging from the Sound the coracle breasted a stretch of open sea, but the broad low island of Colonsay was at hand, "lonely Colonsay," which Columba thought might offer him the haven he desired. He landed on Oransay, a little islet separated from Colonsay only at high tide, but when he climbed to its highest point,

the hills of Erin were still visible in the distance and so he embarked once more. That hill is still called the Cairn-cul-ri-Erin, the Cairn-of-the-back-turned-to-Ireland.

But the quest was nearly over. The last part of the voyage lay again over open sea, bounded only many hundred miles away by that continent Columbus was not to discover till nearly a thousand years later. At last the coracle rounded the south end of Mull: it threaded its way through the treacherous Torren rocks and the monks saw before them a small low-lying green island with a cone-shaped hill towards the north end of it and rocky crags and cliffs to the south. It was the island of Iona, separated from Mull by a Sound of about a mile in width. Instead of sailing up this Sound as the modern sailor does to a sheltered port, Columba and his disciples, wearied by their long voyage, made for the nearest land. The coracle came cautiously in among a cluster of rocky islets and arrived at last in a deep bay between high cliffs. There the monks grounded their vessel on a beach of pebbles steeply terraced by the surge of the Atlantic breakers, which roll up with a noise of thunder, leaving as they fall back a glistening bank of many colours. For the rocks which surround the bay are of quartz, serpentine, white marble and red felspar; and the beach, "which consists of fragments of these rocks rolled and polished by the surf, is almost like a beach of precious stones." [1]

Here then Columba landed. His first act was to climb a rocky hill to the north-west, to see if Ireland was still in sight. Scanning the horizon to the south he saw nothing but the wide stretch of sea broken here and there by surf which marked treacherous sunken rocks. Ireland was no longer in sight: he might remain here and establish his Christian colony.

The old tradition is that the monks drew their coracle up over the terraces of stones to the grassy slope at the top of the bay, that they dug a deep grave

[1] Argyll, *Iona*, 130.

and buried their boat. A grassy mound, about 60 feet long, still to be seen there, is held to mark the resting place of the coracle, and the bay is called after it the Port-of-the-Coracle, or in Gaelic, Port-na-Churaich.

But this bay was not a suitable site for a settlement: it was exposed to the full blast of the south-west wind which brings up heavy weather and big seas at Iona, and the ground near by was rough and unsuitable for cultivation. So Columba and his monks pushed on past the lonely tarn Staonaig, to Machar, a sandy plain where rocks and heather give place "to a lower tract, green with that delicious turf full of thyme and wild clovers which gather upon the soils of shelly sand."[1] The Machar also was exposed and windswept and so the little band crossed over the island to the eastern slope which lies along the Sound towards Mull whose high hills protect it. There, near the foot of Dun-I, (*i.e.* the hill of I or Iona), they found shelter from the gales which swept across the Atlantic, and land which promised pasturage and corn for the maintenance of the monastery.

It was on the 12th of May, 563, the eve of Whitsunday, that Columba landed at Iona. Tradition claims that soon after coming there he burned a heap of Druidical books he had found, but we hear of no contests with Druids on Iona, such as we will meet with further north. O'Donnell tells us that Columba and his monks were met by two Bishops who were in the island "and came to lead Columba by the hand out of it. But God revealed to Colum Cille that they were not true Bishops, whereupon they left the island to him when he told them of their history and their true adventures." These Bishops may have been Druid dignitaries, or they may have been the remaining two of the seven Bishops we read of before, and the story has been considered an additional argument in favour of the view that Christianity had come to Iona before Columba. Hints of this are not wanting; one of the

[1] Argyll, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

old Irish *Lives* of St Bridget relates how as she lay dying, she received the last offices of the Church from an Irishman who was a priest in Mull, Ninidh by name. And we know that two Irish bishops, Brendan and Comgall, fellow-students of Columba's, had been in Scotland before him: they had founded churches on islands near Iona, but they were isolated churches, not centres of Christian activity as Columba's foundation was to be. Iona had undoubtedly a reputation as a seat of Christian effort before Columba came there: it was already set apart as holy ground, for the burial of the chiefs and had the character of a religious settlement.

The island was known in Gaelic as Hi, Y or I, pronounced as E in English. Adamnan refers to it as Ioua, because he makes the name an adjective to agree with *insula, Ioua insula.* Now the early scribes made little difference between the letters *u* and *n* and so by a slip of the pen the island came to be known as Iona. That at least is one of the explanations of its name, but there are many more. Adamnan regarded the name Columba as being the same as Jonah, "what in Hebrew is Iona, in the Greek language is called Peristera and in the Latin Columba." Iona may also be the Gaelic for the Isle of Saints, *I-Shona*, as the *sh* is not sounded and the word is pronounced I-ona. There is a tradition that the island used to be called *Innis-nan-Druidneach* or Isle of the Druids, also, with the omission of one letter, *Innis-nan-Druineach*, Isle of the Sculptors, which would refer to the skilful stone carvers who have left so many beautiful examples of their art on the island, but who were of a much later date than Columba, probably not before the tenth century. After Columba settled at Iona it was generally called *I-Colum-Cille* or *Icolmkill*, the Island-of-Columba-of-the-Church, and Gaelic-speaking people still call it by that name. Another traditional name was the Isle of Dreams, but by whatever name it was known, Iona was always associated with the things of the spirit.

Iona is a small island, 3½ miles long by 1½ broad, although it is so varied and the pilgrimages on it so circuitous by reason of its hills and marshes and the deep indentations of its shores, that it is difficult to realize its comparative smallness. Lying out in the Atlantic among the Hebrides, islands surround it to North and South, while to the West nothing but the vast waters of the ocean lie between Iona and America more than 2000 miles away. On the East, Iona is separated by a narrow but often impassable Sound from Mull, a large island of wild mountains, romantic glens and great sea lochs.

When the traveller ascends Dun-I (400 feet) on a clear day, the whole of the Inner Hebrides lie spread before him. Looking south across the Sound, the treacherous Torren Rocks—the *Merry Men* of R. L. Stevenson—lead away to Colonsay with the three great Paps of Jura beyond, towering above the low shores of Islay. To the East, over the red granite rocks of the Ross of Mull, the terraced Bourg leads up to the mass of Ben More (3170) the highest peak in Mull. Further north Staffa, famous for its basalt columns and for Fingal's cave, lies in the foreground about 8 miles from Iona; beyond it Rum and the rocky Sgurr of Eigg rise above Canna, north again the dim blue of the Coolin Hills of Skye is seen on the horizon. To the north-west the long islands of Coll and Tiree—the *Ethica Insula* of Columba—lie low in the sea with the Dutchman's Cap and the other uninhabited islands of the Treshnish group nearer at hand. The beauty of that view has to be seen to be realized, for it is difficult to explain the fascination of Iona—the quiet beauty of the place, its feeling of apartness from the world, in the world but not of it, set like a jewel in the waters of the Atlantic. Goodness and beauty seem everywhere to abound: in and through them an indescribable atmosphere of holiness and peace lifts the mind from mundane thoughts and floods it with light and freedom.

So fresh and green is the Iona of to-day that it is difficult to realize the island dates from the creation of the earth, before life was known on our planet. Iona is older than any of the islands which surround her—"When our planet from a glowing mass of combustion like the sun, shrivelled into a globe with a solid crust and the first oceans condensed in the hollows of its hot surface—then it was that the Archæan rocks, of which Iona and the Outer Hebrides consist, were formed on the sea bottom. They contain no fossils, for so far as is known, no living creature as yet existed in the desolate waste of waters or on the primeval land. They are hard, rugged, and twisted, and in Iona as elsewhere marble has been developed by the vast heat and pressure they have undergone." The surrounding islands were formed many ages later than Iona. It was in the Tertiary epoch that the "granite of Mull and the basalt of Staffa and the Dutchman's Cap and the Treshnish Islands burst in molten eruption out of the earth. The basalt islands are all that is left above water of an enormous plain of hardened lava, the rest of which has been broken up and engulfed by the devouring sea." [1]

The late Duke of Argyll, the proprietor of the island, wrote a little book about this chief jewel of his possessions which describes the interest of Iona for the geologist, the historian, the antiquary, the artist, the student of religion and natural history. Writing of the place Iona occupied in pre-historic times—a hidden manuscript in Columba's day—the Duke tells us that "Iona is composed of strata which belong to the oldest sedimentary rock yet known to exist in the world . . . Laurentian Gneiss . . . The whole of the Outer Hebrides are composed of this Gneiss. It is the basement on which the mountain ranges of the north-west of Scotland are piled. In Iona the formation consists of a great series of strata . . . of every variety . . . of slate, of quartz, of marble with serpentine and of a mixture of felspar, quartz and hornblende which passes

[1] Trenholme, *The Story of Iona*, p. 8.

frequently into a composition closely resembling granite." On the neighbouring island of Mull, which is composed almost entirely of volcanic rocks, there are traces of the rich vegetation of the Eocene age, stones have been found there bearing the clear cut impression of vine leaves. From that dim region, the Duke leads us down the Stream of Time to the Ice Age, traces of the activities of which are to be found on Iona itself. Not far from where Columba established his monastery, a huge granite boulder which belongs clearly to the other side of the Sound " lies half-embedded in the soil of Iona. It contains more than 200 tons of stone, and there is but one agency in nature which can have transferred that boulder from the opposite coast and deposited it where it now lies. Two other blocks of nearly equal mass lie on the other shore, as if they had been arrested on the way, as if the icy raft on which they took their passage had failed to carry them across the ferry. . . . Iona itself and the view from it present to the eye or to the mind at once some of the surest results and some of the most difficult problems of geological science. Here are proofs of the succession of life through ages which are vast and indefinite, but which are not illimitable. There are, or there seem to be, traces of a beginning." [1]

Although Iona contains about 2000 acres, only one third of it allows of cultivation ; the rest of the island consists of small grassy patches divided from each other by lichen-covered rocks, and in wet weather by tracts of bog and marsh. The whole southern and north-western tracts, guarded on the shore by wild and barren rocks, are uncultivated and uninhabited save for the sheep and cattle which graze there. In Columba's day, the cultivated part of the island lay near the western outlet of the Glen-an-Teampull, through which fertile valley the monks would carry home their produce to the monastery.[2] Drainage was unknown at that

[1] Argyll, *op. cit.*, p. 127 *sqq.*

[2] I am indebted for much of my information about Iona, to the Rev. Archibald MacMillan, minister of the island. Mr

time and much of the island now cultivated would then be under water.

To the artist or lover of nature the appeal of Iona is infinite; the everlasting sea in its changing aspects, the wide expanse of sky which in the damp climate of these islands shows a beauty and variety of colour not to be seen in drier atmospheres. One of the first things which strikes the pilgrim is the snowy whiteness of the sand in the bays and over the whole north end of the island, which is called in Gaelic *Traigh Bhan na Mananch*, the White Strand of the Monks, because at the final Danish invasion, in the end of the tenth century, the Danes landed there and killed the Abbot and fifteen of his monks who had come to meet them. Not only is the sand beautiful in its purity on land, but when the tide is full, the green freshness of the water over this snowy sand is indescribable. Further out from shore, where rocks and seaweed take the place of sand, the colour changes to deep blues and purples, while here and there over a sandbank patches of pale green light up the sea.

The bird life of Iona is rich and varied: the song of soaring larks fills the air of the uplands; by the shore the melancholy cry of the whaup mingles with the calls of innumerable sea-birds which breed on the lonely Treshnish islands: oyster-catchers—Bride's Gillies as they are called in Gaelic—flash by on their swift flight about the rocky islets off the shores, and on calm days solan geese can be seen poising high in the heavens before diving, with a splash of foam, after their prey.

The sea also has its treasures—flounders, rock-cod, saith and mackerel are to be taken in their season; lobster-fishing is practised when weather permits, and there are salmon fisheries off the coast of Mull. Friendly seals are often seen, generally near their headquarters

MacMillan walked with me to the historic sites and generously placed his great knowledge of everything connected with Columba on Iona, at my disposal.

at the island of Soa, a mile and a half out from Port-na-Churaich. Whales, sharks and porpoises are occasional visitors, and the rock pools are rich in the teeming life of the sea-shore. The shells are many and of beautiful colours, from cowries, wentle-traps, and tiny pink scallops to the commoner varieties.

In June, kingcups cover the marshy ground with a golden carpet; belts of yellow iris gleam among the meadows and along the courses of the burns, marking them out like golden rivers winding across the pastures. Some parts of the island are best described as natural rock-gardens, so rich and varied are the flowers, so perfect the arrangement of the rocks. Stone-crops, vetches, tormentillas, orchis, gentian, primroses, hyacinths, bog-myrtle and Columcille's own flower, the little yellow St John's wort[1] grow there in rich profusion, while in damp shady corners the pinguicula waves its purple horn in the soft air. In August the uplands are ablaze with heather, and the pasture ground is a feast of colour, buttercups, daisies, thyme and clover. There are few trees on the island now, but in Columba's day there was a growth of shrubs and bushes from which the monks cut the wattles for the walls of their huts. Near Sand Eel's Bay tresses of ivy overhang the cliffs, and ivy was also no doubt used by the monks in weaving together their walls.

No apology is needed for this long digression on the Iona of to-day, for it is still the Iona of Columba: the daisied meadows, the snowy sands and the rocky uplands are the same as when he walked them, and Columba was a poet and a visionary as well as a man of deeds. Though none of the huts built by his monks have withstood the hand of time, the natural beauties of the island remain as he saw them. Looking out on

[1] The reason St John's Wort is called Columcille's flower is that Columba is said to have carried the plant thrust into the bosom of his gown because of his admiration for John the Baptist. The flower is known in Gaelic as the *armpit package of Columba*, *jewel of Columba*, or *charm of Columba*. See p. 105.

the beauties of sea and sky in the long summer nights, when darkness hardly falls at all, we know that many hundred years ago Columba looked out on the same beauties and felt that in Iona he lived among those unseen things which are eternal. We remember the old Gaelic prophecy that Christ shall come again upon Iona.

Many have been inspired to write on Iona, but few have understood her spirit like Fiona MacLeod. "In spiritual geography," he wrote, "Iona is the Mecca of the Gael. A small island, fashioned of a little sand, a few grasses salt with the spray of an ever-restless wave, a few rocks that wade in heather and upon whose brows the sea-wind weaves the yellow lichen. But since remotest days sacrosanct men have bowed here in worship. In this little island was lit a lamp whose flame lighted pagan Europe from the Saxon in his fen to the swarthy folk who came by Greek waters to trade the Orient. Here Learning and Faith had their tranquil home. From age to age lowly hearts have never ceased to bring their burden here. Iona herself has given us for remembrance a fount of youth more wonderful than that which lies under her own boulders of Dun-I; And here hope waits . . .

"To tell the story of Iona is to go back to God and to end in God." [1]

[1] Fiona MacLeod, *Iona.*

CHAPTER V

STATE OF EUROPE, OF SCOTLAND, AND OF IONA WHEN COLUMBA LANDED THERE

In order to have some idea of the times in which Columba's work was done, we must glance for a moment at the state of events in Europe when he began his mission.

The Eastern half of the Roman Empire had been restored to some of its former glory by the Emperor Justinian who was now in the last year of his reign. "Not one of the great nations of modern Europe had yet been born. The very elements of which they were composed were only then being brought together. All Europe and part of Asia was one large encampment, not of armies merely, but of Races on the march. Wave was following wave from the exhaustless breeding grounds of the north, sweeping away the dying civilizations of the world, but depositing a fruitful soil from which later civilizations were to rise. It was the seed time of our later harvests."[1]

The great Latin Doctors had fought their fight and been gathered to their fathers. Gregory the Great, born in 540, was still a humble student at Rome, he was not to become the supreme power of the Roman Church till 590: it was in 596, the year before Columba died, that Gregory, moved to compassion by the bright faces of English slaves in the market at Rome, sent Augustine to convert the people back to a Christianity which was then but a flickering flame in England.

Benedict of Monte Cassino had died in 543, twenty years before Columba landed in Iona, leaving his great

[1] Argyll, *Iona*, p. 10.

order to purify the ecclesiastical life of Europe. The school of art at Ravenna had risen and died away leaving its legacy of beautiful churches, carvings, mosaics and frescoes. In Constantinople, Sancta Sophia had already reared its majestic dome into the blue sky, sharing with San Vitale of Ravenna the glory of the Byzantine builders. In the East, in Syria, Mahomet was not to open his eyes on the world till seven years after Columba came to Iona.

Europe and Asia were in a state of chaos and upheaval. Nearer at home in England, war and bloodshed were going on during the whole period of Columba's life, for the conquest of southern Britain by Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, which had begun nearly a century before Columba's birth, was only completed by the time of his death. This new invasion swept away the Roman influence and replaced Christianity by pagan superstition. It was an age of savage and relentless warfare.

But Columba in his remote island was far from the echoes of European conflict, even of the conflict in south Britain. His biographers give no indication that the events of the outside world were known in Iona : we hear only of feuds near at hand, of the journeys Columba made over the hills and glens of northern Scotland undisturbed by the echoes of external disputes if indeed he heard them, following after the light as he knew it, allowing nothing to come between him and his work. Although Adamnan and the early Irish biographers baffle our curiosity at many points, they do present us with a picture of Columba which enables us to reconstruct his personal and domestic life at a time when the history of these islands is otherwise obscured by the mists of time.

When Columba came to Iona, Scotland was peopled by different branches of the great Celtic family, divided into four small kingdoms two of which lay to the south and two to the north of the Firths of Forth and Clyde. North of the Firths the country was called Albyn or

Caledonia, south of them Britain. We are concerned only with Caledonia on the west coast of which lay the territory of Dalriada comprising our modern Argyllshire with the islands of Arran, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, Iona, part of Mull, and Tiree. But Dalriada—which was separated from Pictland by the mountains of Drumalban, or, as Adamnan called them, the Dorsal Ridge of Britain—had been greatly reduced a few years before Columba came to Iona when Brude had driven the Scots southwards: it was partly, as we have seen, in order to heal this feud between the Scots and Picts, that Columba came to north Britain. The rest of Caledonia from the Firths of Forth and Clyde right up to the Orkney Islands was ruled over by King Brude, whose realm was divided into two halves by the Grampians, and his people therefore called the Northern and Southern Picts. Some of the Southern Picts had been converted by St Ninian and his disciples, though in many districts they had lapsed from the faith, but the Northern Picts with King Brude and his Court still held their pagan beliefs.

There is a tradition that Connall of Dalriada had offered Iona to his cousin Columba and invited him to establish his monastery there: in any case Iona was the burial-place of the Dalriadic chiefs, and we are justified in believing that when Columba landed there the few inhabitants were Irish Gaels or Scots of his own country, speaking his own language. The Scots spoke a dialect of the Gaelic branch of the Celtic language: the Picts probably spoke another dialect of the same language, but with differences of pronunciation of grammar and of idiom which made it necessary for Columba when he first went among them to take an interpreter with him. In Argyllshire and the other islands inhabited by the Scots, the language was of course his own, but before he came it was only a spoken dialect: he and his monks brought over the written language which they spread along with Christianity among the Picts, thus providing the medium for the

Celtic literature of the Scottish Highlands; this, too, is one of the reasons why Scottish history begins with Columba, wh· · we know so little about Iona before he went there.

But in those remote parts when there was little communication between one part of the country and another—especially in that sea-girt and wind-swept region—the lives of the islanders would change very little with the passing of years or centuries. Owing to the development of communications, the last hundred years have probably made more difference than the previous ten hundred. The islander of a hundred years ago would live very much the same life as the islander of twelve hundred years ago, because he depended on the forces of Nature for his livelihood, he had to contend with Nature for his daily bread. His means of subsistence were limited to the fish he could catch, the sheep and cattle and goats he could graze on the pasture-land and the rather precarious crops he could raise on the small patches of fertile ground between the ribs of rock which broke every few yards through the thin covering of soil.

The early dwellings were constructed of wooden uprights with two walls of wickerwork interwoven between the supports, and the space between filled in with turfs or clay. Straw or heather were used for thatch, tied down by slinging ropes across the roof, each end tied round a heavy stone which hung at the side of the hut and kept the roof secure. That system may still be seen at Iona, though corrugated iron has shed its blight on the island.

Heaps of heather or bracken served for litters or couches; feathers were only used for the beds of chiefs. For artificial light the islander used a crusie fed with oil he extracted from the livers of fish or seals. And in winter he plied his handicraft, for in those days every man had some particular trade as well as his general pastoral one. In one hut there would be a maker of hide boots laced together with leathern thongs: another

hut would shelter a smith and so on, while the making of cloth would be practised by every family. The wool was shorn from the sheep with shears not unlike those used to-day, and after the men had done the shearing the whole operation of converting the wool into cloth was done by the women, scouring, combing, carding and spinning with a distaff and spindle (the spinning-wheel was a much later invention). After the natives had passed the stage of wearing the whole fleece, they wore garments made of this rough cloth sometimes in its natural colour, sometimes dyed with native dyes. For making the cloth into garments woollen thread was used, or in the very earliest times, fine gut sewn with a bone needle.

The natives understood tanning; the skins were dressed and cured with flint knives and scrapers. Leather skins were used to cover the wicker frames of coracles, also for boots and bags to hold liquids. In Columba's *Life* we hear of leather bags being used by the monks for carrying home milk from the pastures.

The smith was an important member of society in these warlike times: he made swords and spears and axes, and his bellows and anvil were constructed on the same principle as those used to-day. Several stone moulds have been found in Iona, into which the smith would pour the molten liquid. When his axe or spear head was hardened he tied it with leathern thongs to a wooden handle.

The carpenter had not much to do on Iona before Columba: after he came the monks used to sail away to bring back oak trees to repair their church, and beams of pine and oak to build their "stout" boats. The carpenters' tools were made both of metal and stone, sometimes of wood used with sand which would grind its way even through stone.

As for agriculture, the islander—at least after Columba's arrival—grew wheat, oats, and barley, though of smaller kinds than those grown on the mainland, for the soil was not deep enough to support heavy crops.

The cultivated plots were small and would be dug by hand, though the plough was known by that time on the mainland, and was made either of iron or charred wood. The crofter had implements of stone, flint, bronze and iron as early as the fifth century; he cut his corn with a sickle, the heads being cut off first and the straw reaped at leisure later on. After cutting, the corn was winnowed or thrashed with a flail on the floor of the barn, which had a hollow scooped out in one corner to which the grain was swept.

Flocks and herds constituted the wealth of that age. The cow was the most important of the domestic animals: it was the standard of value, wages and marriage dowries being estimated in cows. The small shaggy breed of Highland cattle throve on the sparse growth of the hill-sides. Butter was made in long, deep churns, the dasher being dashed up and down by hand, just as it is to-day in Iona. The pigs, which came next in value to the cows, were kept in their natural state running freely over the island as they do to this day, but the pigs of the West Highlands were a thin, muscular active race who foraged for their own food and only came into shelter on winter nights when they pushed their way in among the family to the hearth. Most of the pigs were fattened and killed in the autumn, and this meat formed one of the staple foods of the island till summer came round again.

The vessels in domestic use were generally made of wood but there were also stone cups and bowls; gold, silver, brass, bronze, and glass vessels were not unknown by that time, but would not likely have come to Iona; the usual drinking vessels of the Western Highlands were horns or shells. The islanders traded with each other and with visitors from Mull and the mainland, by barter: money was not known in these islands till at least the middle of the eighth century and probably not till later.

This brief sketch of the life of the times must be taken in a general sense: there is no record of what took

place at Iona before Columba, but we know that these customs and implements were common in Ireland in the sixth century, and the inhabitants of Argyllshire and its islands had come from Ireland in the beginning of that century. Iona, although remote in position, was the burial-place of chiefs: it was holy ground, there would be more coming and going from it than from any of the other western islands, and its civilization would be abreast of that of Ireland.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONASTIC SETTLEMENT AT IONA

THE site where Columba determined to establish his monastery was about two hundred yards to the north of the present Cathedral.[1] The early monks of course built their huts with their own hands, and so after Columba had chosen his site, sheltered from the winds by the high ground to north and south and near the only stream of any size on the island, his followers began to level and clear the ground. Some of them collected twigs or ivy for the walls of their huts, while others worked at the *rath* or *vallum* which was to surround the settlement. This rampart of earth and stones is still to be seen, and is one of the chief means of identifying the site of the original buildings. The vallum is a feature of early monastic settlements, and though it was not required in Iona as a protection, it was a tradition that monasteries should be so surrounded, and Columba did not depart from it. The buildings inside this wall were Columba's hut, the church, the refectory, the huts of the monks, the guest-house and the cook-house. This main part of the settlement lay on the slope, a cluster of little huts with two larger buildings, the church and the refectory. Columba's own hut was built at the top of the slope, probably between the present farm-house of Clachanach and the red-roofed cottage to the south of it, and was ultimately built of planks and finished with lock and key,

[1] The present buildings date from the fourteenth century, almost eight hundred years after Columba: although they carried on the direct succession of monastic life on the island, they have nothing to do with Columba. See p. 214.

for the monks expended their utmost skill to make a worthy dwelling-place for their abbot. From his door, Columba commanded a wide view over the monastery and across the Sound. He could see the ferry-boat setting sail from Mull, bringing guests, perhaps, to partake of his wide hospitality, or he could watch for a sail on the horizon telling of the return of his monks from some voyage he had sent them. From his door, too, he could look over the Sound to the rocky islets off the Ross of Mull, to the terraced Bourg and the lofty heights of Ben More. No wonder then that peace and serenity came to him at Iona.

The monks' huts, which were arranged round an open space where Columba used to pace up and down, consisted like the secular dwellings of the period of wooden uprights interlaced with twigs and probably plastered on the outside with mud or turfs. That was not a durable style of building, and it is not surprising that few traces of the settlement now remain.

The refectory must have been of a fair size, for we read of Columba sitting in it and seeing one of his monks reading there " at some distance." It was built round a flat granite ice-carried boulder which has now disappeared, but which then served as a table: there are references to this boulder in the early manuscripts, " luck was left on all the food that was put on the flat stone of division." Columba himself once set down a bag of oats on this flat stone, to bring luck to the grain, before carrying it up the hill to be ground into meal.

The church would be at one end of the little court formed by the huts of the monks. It was at first probably a wattle building, but when, later on, the brothers brought back a boatload of oaken beams they built a fine church, one large enclosure with an altar on which the holy vessels were laid, and a side-chapel or *cubiculum* which served as a sacristy and in which the bell was kept. The bell was an important part of monastic life: every new church was supplied with a

bell, and it was one of the chief duties of the smith attached to the monastery to make bells for the churches. They were of small size and simple construction: a sheet of metal, the edges of which were bent over and riveted together, a loop of iron let into the top and the whole dipped in molten bronze which ran into and filled up the joints. Special powers were attributed to the bells of the early saints as well as to the shrines in which they were sometimes encased. The Christian missionary was regarded by the Picts as a "superior kind of medicine-man" and his bell as "one of the chief instruments of his art."

The *hospitium* or guest-house at Iona was nearly always occupied: all sorts of people came to ask Columba's advice, from kings down to fugitives from justice. Some of the monks were specially told off to attend on the guests, for hospitality was regarded as one of the chief of the Christian virtues.

Outside the vallum there was another cluster of buildings connected with the settlement; the cow-house, two barns or granaries, one near the monastery, the other near the fields, the smithy, the mill, the stable, the carpenters' shop and the kiln, the foundations of which can still be plainly seen (the kiln had to be built of stone because the fire used to dry the corn would have set fire to a wattle building). The position of the barn is known from the old Gaelic name of a piece of ground to the south of the stream, *Laun*, that is, *food* or *provisions*. The position of the mill is also certain, for it stood beside the only stream in Iona capable of turning a mill-wheel.

The situation of the monastery is further confirmed by Adamnan's story about Ernan, Columba's uncle, who was for a short time superior of the settlement on Hinba island. When Ernan became ill he asked to be taken back to Iona that he might see Columba before he died. Hearing that Ernan had landed, Columba set out to meet him at the Port of the Monastery. "Ernan himself, although with faltering footsteps, was

attempting with joyous activity to walk from the landing-place to meet the Saint. But when there was between those two a space of about twenty-four paces, he was overtaken with sudden death." That happened before the door of the kiln and two great crosses were erected according to the custom of the time, one where Ernan died and the other where Columba had stood. The crosses have disappeared, but the place where they stood was long known as *Na Croisean Mor*, the Place of the Great Crosses.

The burial-place lay between the monastery and the Sound, and there is a strange legend connected with the first monastic burial at Iona. In the words of the old Irish *Life*, "Said Columb Cille to his household: 'It is well for us that our roots should go under the ground here. . . . It is permitted to you that some of you should go under the earth here or under the mould of the island to consecrate it' . . . Odran rose up readily and this he said, 'If I should be taken,' saith he, 'I am ready for that.' 'O Odran,' saith Columb Cille, 'thou shalt have the reward thereof. No prayer shall be granted to anyone at my grave unless it is first asked of thee.' Then Odran went to Heaven. Columba founded a church by him afterwards." [1]

The traditional version of this story is that Oran offered himself to be buried alive, in order to drive away the evil spirits who were preventing the building of Columba's church. The belief in the power of human sacrifice to sanctify a building or a place was ancient and universal, and it is possible that Columba was under the thraldom of this superstition which prevailed in the Highlands till recent times. When Sacheverell, the Governor of Man, was at Iona in 1688, he heard the legend, which, he says, with dry humour, "shews that the Saints themselves are not always free from Whimseys." Pennant who visited Iona in 1772 heard the legend

[1] *Lives of the Saints* from the Book of Lismore. Ed. by Dr Whitley Stokes.

with additions: "At the end of three days," he writes, "Columba had the curiosity to take a farewell look at his old friend and caused the earth to be removed. To the surprise of all beholders, Oran started up and began to reveal the secrets of his prison-house and particularly declared that all that had been said of Hell was a mere joke. This dangerous impiety so shocked Columba, that with great policy he instantly ordered the earth to be flung in again." The old Gaelic version has grown into a proverb used to check the garrulous, "Earth, earth on Oran's eye, lest he say more." It is probable that Oran was the first of the community to die and that the tradition grew round that fact and wove itself through the centuries into a romance. But the old burying-ground is still called the *Reilig Oran* (*Reilig* being the old Irish for burying-place, from the Latin *Reliquæ*). The little chapel called St Oran is said to have been built by Queen Margaret of Scotland in honour of St Columba, but named after his disciple. It is possible that the chapel stands on the very site of one built by Columba, for the old *Life* says that after Oran's death, Columba founded a church *by him*.

With the exception of the church, Columba's hut and the kiln, it is probable that all the early buildings were of wattles. We hear of the monks returning to Iona from a voyage, their freight ship laden with bundles of twigs which they had collected from the croft of a peasant—but they told Columba that the poor man was "very sorry on account of the loss." Columba was at once eager to make reparation. "Lest we do the man any wrong," he said, "take him twice three measures of barley and let him sow it now on his arable land." This the monks did, the peasant receiving the gift doubtfully, for it was late in the season. But his wife believed in Columba. "Do what thou hast been ordered by the Saint," she urged, "the Lord will give whatever he asketh." And so the peasant ploughed, and the crop which he sowed "against hope" he gathered

in full and ripe. Adamnan tells us of a later voyage to bring home oaken beams for the church, but stone buildings on the bee-hive principle were known by this time, and the kiln must have been built on that plan. There was no want of stone in the neighbourhood: the Ross of Mull has inexhaustible quarries of granite, and bronze wedges for breaking up large stones were known by the early Celts. (It may be mentioned in passing that one ice-carried boulder which was split up in Iona in recent years proved sufficient to build a crofter's cottage.) And so it is likely that before Columba died there were stone buildings on the island. The Hermit's Cell[1] was built of stone, and there are ruins of numerous beehive cells at Port Laraichen, near Port-na-Churaich.

The twelve Irish monks who had come over with Columba were soon joined by Britons and Saxons drawn to Iona by the fame of the abbot. He referred to all the inmates of the monastery as The Family, and soon these numbered 150 souls. According to the old Irish verse:

> Wondrous the warriors who abode in Hi,
> Thrice fifty in the monastic rule,
> With their boats along the main sea,
> Three score men a-rowing.

Each member took a solemn vow that he willingly forsook the world and entered the monastery in order to spread the Gospel. He was then tonsured, the whole front part of the head being shaved from ear to ear, according to the Irish fashion which had prevailed since the time of Patrick. These monks were neither hermits nor recluses: they were not even monks as we understand the word to-day, but active missionaries who lived in community and supported themselves by their own toil. The members of the monastery were called by Columba the *Soldiers of Christ, Milites Christi*, Columba himself being known as *the Warrior of the*

[1] P. 129.

Island. "The designation was more than a figure of speech, for in those days monastic settlements not infrequently had recourse to the arm of the flesh, and on occasion of great ecclesiastical assemblies the brethren regularly carried arms till as late as the days of Adamnan." [1]

The inmates of the monastery were divided into three classes: the *Seniors* were older than the rest of the brethren and were chiefly engaged in transcribing the Scriptures; the *Working brethren*, the most numerous class, were the physically robust, who attended to the household, made the food, herded the sheep and cattle, and worked the farm; the third class were those under instruction, the *Juniors* or *alumni*; although not yet admitted to the rule of the monastery for life, they wore the clerical habit. Some of these *alumni* came from long distances to live the arduous life of the community as a voluntary penance. When such penitents arrived, they were conducted to Columba and required to confess their sins on their bended knees in presence of the assembled brothers. They were then either granted absolution or given a penance "according to the judgment of the Saint." Sometimes their penance would be exile for seven or twelve years to some outlying island—Tiree was a penitential settlement—for exile was the heaviest punishment Columba could imagine, feeling his own exile so keenly.[2] When at last the penitents were received as full members, they were conducted to the chapel where the Saint was waiting to receive them, then devoutly kneeling, they swore, by the name of the Most High God, to be faithful to their vows.

[1] Hume Brown, *History of Scotland*, p. 16.

[2] The heaps of loose stones collected together on the shore near Port-na-Churaich are said to have been gathered as penances by the monks, "who had to raise heaps of dimensions equal to their crimes. To judge by some it is no breach of charity to think that there were among them enormous sinners." Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*, ii., 297.

If any of the brothers wished to lead a solitary life, he went to live at some distance from the monastery without breaking off his connection with it. The place where such a monk lived was called a *Disert*, and there is a bay at Iona called Port-na-Disert, which means literally, the Hermitage.

The brothers wore coarse gowns of rough, undyed wool over a tunic of finer texture; on feast-days they wore white robes. Columba himself never wore linen next his skin, by way of mortification: his dress was completed by a cowl or *cuculla*, but whether the monks wore this is not stated. In bad weather a coarse outer cloak was allowed to be worn over the ordinary gown. The shoes or sandals were of hide, laced together with leathern thongs. Perhaps they were removed on sitting down to meals, or perhaps the habit of kicking off the shoes under the table had even then developed, for there is a story about Cainnech, Columba's friend and fellow-student, that Columba once called on Cainnech to pray for him and his monks when they were in peril on the sea, and Cainnech rushed from the table with one shoe on his foot saying, "It is not time for us to dine when the vessel of Columba is in danger." It is gratifying to know that Cainnech's precipitancy was rewarded, the storm abating immediately.

The meals at the monastery were of the simplest, consisting chiefly of cereal food, porridge, bread, milk, eggs and fish. Sometimes when a seal was captured its flesh would be eaten, and sometimes a salmon was caught off Mull. Once when Columba and five of his companions, "hardy fishermen," were fishing in the river Seil and had caught nothing, "Try again," said Columba: "and in obedience to his command they hauled in their nets a salmon of astounding size." Such incidents were frequent, and though they call for no miraculous explanation, they were regarded by the people as proofs of Columba's magical powers.

The hours of the meals differed with the seasons of the year: Wednesday and Friday were the regular

fast-days, but the rule was relaxed between Easter and Pentecost. In Lent the fast was kept till the evening of every day except Sunday, when milk, bread and eggs were allowed during the day. On Sundays and festivals, or when there were guests at table, the food was better and more ample. We read in Adamnan of sheep being killed as a present for some poor man; on special days beef and mutton might figure on the refectory table, and the Sound supplied fish in abundance. We do not hear much about the preparation of the food or about the utensils used, but Adamnan mentions a cook, a baker—the latter a Saxon monk—a wooden griddle for roasting meat, a knife, a water-pot, and an energetic "butler" who "twirled the ladle round in the strainer."

Seeing that the arable land of the monastery lay mostly near the western outlet of the Temple Glen, the monks probably went to and from their work by the Glen, a much more direct route than that followed by the modern road. The corn after being carried home was ground into coarse and fine flour and stored in chests. The grinding was done at first in a hand-quern such as is still used in remote parts of the Highlands, and examples of which have been dug up at Iona; but later on a water-mill was constructed, the wheel of which was turned by the stream which flowed down past the barn and smithy. While porridge was the chief food, meal and flour were also baked into loaves, generally mixed with water, but sometimes with milk or honey, or as a great luxury, with the roe of a salmon. These loaves were baked on a flat stone supported over a fire. When in after years, the number of the monks on Iona increased and there was not enough grain on the island to support the inhabitants, the new settlement of Tiree, the *Ethica Insula*, or *Land of Corn*, provided the mother institution with food.

We know nothing about the vegetables the monks grew, but there is a pleasing story about Columba and an old woman whom he found cutting nettles. When

he asked her what they were for, "O darling father!" saith she, "I have only one cow and she is in calf, and this is what serves me while expecting it for a long time." "Colum Cille then determines that pottage of nettles should serve him more so long as he was alive, saying: 'Since,' saith he, 'it is only for expectation of the one cow that she is in this great hunger, meet were it for us though sore be the hunger in which we should be: for better is that which we expect, even *Regnum perenne.* And he saith to his servant: 'Pottage,' saith he, 'from thee every night and bring not the milk with it.' 'It shall be done,' saith the cook. He bores the mixing stock of the pottage so that it became a pipe, and he used to pour the meat-juice into the pipe down, so that it was mixed through the pottage. . . ."[1]

The cows and sheep and pigs were herded on the pasture land, which at that time comprised the whole northern and southern portions of the island. After the cows were milked the monks carried home the milk in leather bags or wooden pitchers fashioned to fit the back. Sometimes the milk was taken home in a little cart drawn by the white pony of the monastery, a light vehicle with solid wooden wheels which could travel over rough ground. In later times Columba was regarded as the patron saint of cattle, and the shepherd driving his herd out to the pasture would chant the *Herding Blessing*—

Travelling moorland, travelling townland
Travelling mossland long and wide,
Be the herding of God the Son about your feet,
Safe and whole may ye home return.

The sanctuary of God and Columba,
Encompass your coming and going
And about you be the milkmaid of the soft palms
Bride of the clustering hair, golden grown.
And about you be the milkmaid of the soft palms
Bride of the clustering hair, golden grown.[2]

[1] *Lives of the Saints*, from the Book of Lismore.
[2] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, i., p. 281.

The monastery possessed also a little island where the seals or sea-calves bred; this seems to have been one of the rocky islands off the Ross of Mull, possibly the island of Erraid. The monks used the seal skins for coverings in the winter, the oil for burning in their crusies, and the flesh as a welcome addition to their table. (Seals were used for food in the outer islands down to the eighteenth century.)

For fuel the monks cut peat from a moss near the north end, which is now worked out. They lighted their fires with flint and steel and tinder: for artificial light in the long winter nights they used candles which were known in Britain as early as the time of St Patrick: their crusies for oil were probably the same as the "lanterns" they carried to light them to midnight services in the church.

The monks slept on pallets of heather or bracken, covered by a sheet, with a blanket of some coarse material on the top. They lay down to rest with their day-habits on, for they had to rise at dead of night to go to service in the church. The pillow was generally of wood, though in the case of Columba himself it was of stone: a small granite boulder found near the place where he was buried has always been regarded as his pillow. It is 20 inches long and has a cross incised on one side of it. Columba's bed is also said to have been less comfortable than those of his monks: tradition mentions a stone flag with a hide laid over it.

The brothers lived arduous lives: they practised their religious rites day and night, they did the work of the farm, ploughing, sowing, harvesting, grinding, baking, building and so on, as well as travelling on missions for the Saint by land and sea, and copying the Scriptures. Columba worked as hard as any of his monks: he also carried home the grain from the fields on his back, the flour from the mill to the kitchen. When the day's work was done he rendered his monks the ancient service of washing their feet, following in all things the example of Christ. Though the monks

worked hard, Columba was no unthoughtful taskmaster: he often went out to encourage them in their work, sometimes walking, sometimes riding on the white pony and when he came to be an old man, driving in the little cart. Once when he had recalled a monk from Loch Awe and he had come all that long journey without delay, Columba praised his prompt obedience and told him he must now "rest awhile." And once on a very cold day in winter, Diarmit found Columba anxious and depressed. When he asked the cause of this sadness Columba answered, "With just cause am I sad to-day, my child, seeing that my monks, now wearied after their severe labours, are engaged by Laisran in building a large house: with this I am much displeased." Columba's displeasure, says Adamnan, was at that moment conveyed to Laisran in the monastery of Derry. He felt impelled to stop the monks in their building operations and to order some refreshment to be made ready for them. He also gave directions that they were to rest, not only on that day but also on other occasions of severe weather. "The Saint, hearing in spirit these words of consolation . . . rejoiced with exceeding great joy . . . while he blessed Laisran for his timely relief to the monks." (I., xxiii). Laisran took this lesson so much to heart that he was afterwards known as the Consoler of Monks, from his thoughtfulness for their welfare. There are several stories of this nature showing how constantly Columba's monks were in his thoughts. He knew instinctively when they were in danger by sea or land. And though the stories may be exaggerated by his admiring biographers, they express the thoughts and feeling of the age. The monks looked on Columba as their father; he cared for them as his family and had them always in his mind, whether they were with him at Iona, tempted perhaps by evil spirits of curiosity or jealousy, or whether they were sailing on long voyages at his behest. Even through the exaggeration of the stories we can appreciate the close sympathy between Columba and his monks:

his thought sped out to them in danger, comforting and strengthening them. Such bonds of sympathy are not unknown in our own day.

We have left to the last one of the most important occupations of the monks of Iona, the practice of writing and the transcription of the Scriptures. In this as in everything connected with the spread of Christianity in Scotland, we have to look to Ireland for the history and development of the art. Letters were known in Ireland before St Patrick's day: he used to instruct his disciples in the art of writing. The characters, and designs used by these early scribes were probably of Byzantine origin and would come to Ireland from Ravenna through Gaul. The Irish adapted them to their own idea of beauty, but though early Irish manuscripts have features peculiar to Ireland, similar interlacings are found in early Italian churches, especially in those of Ravenna. These interlacings symbolized life and immortality, having neither beginning nor end. Designs of interlaced ribbon work, plaited rushes, bands, cords and knots are common to the earliest art of various peoples, and when the first missionaries came to Ireland bringing copies of the Gospels, they naturally brought this art with them. The object of the writing was, of course, to multiply copies of the Scriptures. But although many service books were copied simply for use, the monks were so impressed by the grandeur of the message, that they often tried to make the copy in some degree worthy of the matter: they thought nothing but the finest work they could achieve was good enough as a medium for the spread of the Gospels.

The school of illumination, for which Irish monks afterwards became so famous, was then in its infancy. The writing was done sometimes on wax tablets with styles, but for important books like copies of the Gospels, parchment was used. The Irish did not understand the dressing of the skins so well as the continental scribes, and their parchment, made of the skins of calves, goats or sheep, was therefore not so thin as that used on

the Continent. Their pens were of goose, swan or crow quills, and the ink was carefully prepared by the monks themselves: it was probably made of materials not now used, for the black letters of the early MS. are still clear and distinct, as are the colours of the great illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells. The ink-bottle was conical in shape and was fastened to the arm of the writer's chair or supported on a stick stuck into the floor, which was generally of mud. Writing was then a delicate operation and the graceful curves of the uncial script appealed to the artistic perception of these Irish scribes: a monk would gladly spend his whole life on one beautiful copy of the Gospels. The art of penmanship is neglected in our day, but anyone who has attempted it will understand the joy of making one perfect glowing letter.

Although this art was undeveloped in Columba's time, we have seen how eagerly he followed it. In his case it was the matter which chiefly interested him, and he is known to have made innumerable copies of the Scriptures. The only manuscript we can with any certainty regard as his, was written hurriedly in order that he might possess a copy of a new translation, although it was believed till recent years that the Books of Kells and Durrow were written by his hand. The very perfection of these books assigns them to a period when the art of illumination had reached a much more advanced stage. The Book of Kells was probably written in the eighth century and it is possible that it may have been written at Iona. The Book of Durrow was most likely copied from the exemplar Columba wrote with his own hand and gave to Durrow.[1]

The manuscripts written by Columba were supposed, like everything else belonging to him, to possess supernatural powers. The *Annals* of the monastery of Clonmacnois state that he wrote 300 books with his own hand, but 300 was a sacred number in Irish legend and comes into many miracle stories. "They were all

[1] P. 30, 31, *note*.

New Testaments and he left a book to each of his churches . . . which books have a strange property: if any of them had sunk to the bottom of the deepest waters, they would not lose one letter or sign or character of them which I have seen tried. . . . I saw an ignorant man . . . when sickness came on cattle, for their remedy put water on the book and suffer it to rest therein, and saw also the cattle return thereby to their former state and the book receive no loss."

There must have been at Iona a separate room or hut where the writing materials were kept, a library where those engaged in transcribing the scriptures might work, where the *polaires* containing the finished copies hung on the walls and where the valuable manuscripts were kept. On their journeys the monks carried the Scriptures in these leather satchels or polaires, the front of which were ornamented with the same interlaced designs used by the scribes. Straps were laced to the polaires by thongs and they were carried by a broad central strap which hung over the shoulder. Columba is said to have blessed one hundred polaires, " for it was his wont to make crosses and writing tablets and book-satchels and other church gear." [1]

In the library, or writing room, the monks would study and learn the " Wisdom of the Holy Scripture." For the monasteries then were not like the monasteries of our day: they were rather the universities where men about to found churches and monasteries of their own came to be trained. Part of the learning of Divine wisdom consisted in memorizing the Book of Psalms, but the monks also learned Latin and Hebrew and

[1] After the art of illumination had been brought to an extraordinary degree of perfection, the same designs came to be used in the medium of stone and metal. But although there were workers of metal in Iona when Columba lived, no early examples of metal work have been found on the island. Bronze brooches which belong to the earliest period, have been found in Mull, but when the Danes and Norsemen raided Iona in the eighth and ninth centuries, they carried off all the metal work they could find.

Greek, and could read manuscripts in these languages. Latin was used in speaking on state occasions: it was the language of the Church, and the only language in which the Scriptures were known. As for other literature, the monastery no doubt possessed manuscript Lives of the Saints, such as Athanasius' *Life of St Anthony*, the *Life of St Martin of Tours*, and of *St Germanus of Auxerre*.

We may think of the monk of Iona then, sitting in the writing room, copying the story of the life of Christ, poring over his work, intent on glorifying God by the beauty of every curve. Through the open door or window he would see the green pastures sloping down to the Sound, he would hear the waves lapping on the white sands. He would reflect for a moment on the beauty of the world in which God had placed him, he would feel that He who created such beauty must be a loving Father who cared for His children. And then he would bend again to his task, forming his slender curves and laying on his glowing colours to the glory and the praise of God.

CHAPTER VII

THE RULE OF COLUMBA

Monastic life on the Continent and especially in Italy had become lax and material by the beginning of the sixth century, when St Benedict felt impelled to launch his reform. But the Irish monasteries, being of a later date, were still high on the wave of their first enthusiasm. Ireland had never been conquered by the Romans, her Church was free from any corrupting influence and the Celtic monasteries were not only "the great missionary colleges of the Church—they seem to have embraced and absorbed almost all that then existed of ecclesiastical organization."[1] The monastery had grown up in Ireland into a well organized institution, and was a splendid instrument for advancing Christianity. It was a shelter from the world for those who wished to lead a life of piety or learning, and it was a Christian colony which gave amidst a heathen and savage population a practical example of the Christian life in all its features, and created in all hearts the desire to share the blessings of such a civilization. It was a sanctuary to which everyone who was wronged or persecuted could repair with the assurance that he would find protection. Such was the institution Columba set up at Iona. From this centre the north and west of Scotland were to be converted, while central Scotland and the east coast of England were to receive Christian colonies from it. But Columba was more than a missionary, he was a statesman. He was to consolidate the kingdom of Dalriada and establish on its

[1] Argyll, *Iona* 37.

throne a monarch whose lineal descendant sits on the throne of Britain to-day.

Columba belonged to the Second Order of Irish Saints: his church was an off-shoot from the great Church of Ireland and followed its system and practices, so that the peculiar circumstances of the Irish Church were responsible for unusual features in the government of the Columban Church. The chief of these was the number of bishops compared to the size of the church. The Irish Church differed both from Presbytery and Episcopacy, for although the bishops had power over the community, they were subordinate in some respects to the abbot of the monastery. The early church in Ireland consisted of small Christian colonies set down in the midst of a heathen land, surrounded by a pagan population inclined at first to be hostile. The only way the Christians could ensure safety for themselves and their property was by living together in communities which were large enough to withstand any hostility evinced by the pagans; and this was probably a determining factor in the monastic character of the early Irish Church. These little colonies were sometimes at great distances from each other and for that reason each colony had to have its own monastic bishop who could perform episcopal functions but was under the rule of the abbot who was his monastic superior. When the rulers of the land were converted, each provincial king or chief would have at least one bishop, sometimes two or more, to attend to the religious life of the clan; and in those days everyone considered worthy on account of learning or piety, of helping in the spread of the Gospel, was considered worthy of being made a bishop. While in the monastery these bishops were under the jurisdiction of the abbot, they had their own privileges and rights: they had the right of ordination and they celebrated the sacrament in a different manner from the priests. Columba showed the greatest reverence for those of episcopal rank. Once when an Irishman arrived at Iona and "in

his humility did all he could to disguise himself," they were about to break bread together on the Lord's Day, when Columba, suddenly looking into the stranger's face said, "Christ bless thee, brother: do thou break bread alone according to the episcopal rite for I know now thou art a bishop. Why hast thou disguised thyself so long and prevented our giving thee the honour we owe thee?" (I., xxxv.)

Columba himself was only a Presbyter, but he could pronounce absolution, and although he lived chiefly at the Mother Church of Iona—"our island which now has the primacy"—he reigned supreme over all the churches of his Order whether founded by himself or by his monks.

The officials of the monastery were the abbot, prior, bishop, scribe or *ferleiginn* (the offices of bishop and scribe were often held by one man), anchorite, cook, baker, butler, attendant or minister, gardener and messengers. There was also an official who helped the abbot in the governing of the community when at home and took his place when he was away on missionary journeys. Baithene fulfilled these duties for many years and also superintended the farm work at Iona till Columba sent him to preside over his penitential settlement in Tiree.

Baithene had spent most of his life with his cousin Columba as fosterling and disciple. He was of a simple and tender disposition. When Columba's ire was aroused against a sinner, Baithene would often intervene and suggest that the "repentance of the unhappy man should be received." Columba was devoted to him, and used to compare him to St John the Divine, for he was reminded by Baithene's gentle ways of the disciple whom Jesus loved. His fellow-monks were fond of him too, and admired him for his learning, which they claimed was unequalled on this side of the Alps, save by Columba, for the disciple was not to be compared with the Master. "Baithene was full of the spirit of prayer: while walking his hands were

clasped under his habit; while reaping he prayed as he carried the handfuls of oats, and at meals he would say *Deus in auditorium meum* between every two morsels of food."[1] Baithene, like Columba, was a diligent scribe, and there is a story of how one day when he had written the last page of a copy of the Book of Psalms, he took it to Columba and asked that one of the brethren might look over it and correct any slips. Columba replied instantly, "Why give this trouble without any cause? In that Psalter there is not one superfluous letter to be found, nor is any wanting save the one vowel I." Modern writers will envy the Saint his intuition—a quicker and less laborious method than the proof-reading of the present day. Before we leave Baithene we must record one of his visions, and Columba's interpretation of it which shows us the Saint in a humble mood. Baithene saw in a dream three thrones in Heaven, one of gold, one of silver, and one of glass. "That is clear," said Colum Cille interpreting, "Ciaran, son of the wright has the throne of gold on account of his honour and because of his hospitality. Thou thyself, O Baithene, hast the throne of silver, because of thy purity and the lustre of thy devotion. The throne of glass is mine, for though my devotion is fair, I am often frail, and I am carnal." O'Donnell's version of this story (§ 123) is more poetic: according to it Columba said: "The crystal chair is mine . . . for the brightness, and the purity, and the fragility of my piety. For it is the nature of crystal to be pure and bright, so that all men may see all things therein and through it. But it is possible to chequer it with every kind of colour, and it is lightly broken and not strong by nature."

Diarmit was Columba's personal attendant and was not of high ecclesiastical rank; his was the devoted service which knows no fame, but is always in the background supporting and strengthening him to whom it

[1] Fowler, *Adamnani Vita S. Columbæ.*

is rendered, enabling him to perform his great destiny unhindered by care for lesser things.

Columba exercised absolute authority over his little community: he sent his monks away on long journeys at a moment's notice, to the North, to the East and to the West by sea, and inland across Mull on foot. He once sent one of his monks away to Ireland without the full complement of sailors, but reassured him, "Go in peace," he said, "thou shalt have a favourable and steady breeze till thou reach Hibernia." While some were away, the busy life of the others went on. Iona was a place of learning as well as of teaching; monks and *alumni* from far and near came to study under Columba.

The Seniors recited the Psalter daily, but the working monks, busy in the fields, were not required to attend service during the working hours. In the evening the whole community gathered in the church to give thanks for the blessings of the day.

The sacrament was celebrated on the Lord's Day and on feast days; the festival began after sunset on the preceding day and the services were Vespers, Matins, Prime, Tierce, Sext, and probably None, the sacrament being celebrated either at Prime or at Sext. The choir or *cantores* sang the office and the ritual was simple: the officiating priest at the altar blessed and consecrated the elements which had been brought in by a deacon. If several priests were present, one of them would be asked to break bread with the officiating priest to show their equality, but a bishop would break bread alone. After the elements were consecrated, the brethren drew near and shared in the rite, partaking of the elements.

The Feast of the Nativity was held at Iona, but Easter was the great festival of the Columban Church. It was celebrated at a different time in Ireland and consequently at Iona, from the festival at Rome, because when St Patrick went to Ireland, the date at which the Romans celebrated Easter was wrongly

computed. After the mistake was rectified, it took a long time for news of the change to reach Ireland, and when it did, the Irish Church clung to its old usage. There was sometimes a month's difference between the Easter of the Celtic and Roman Churches. The monks of Iona held to their old date even after the Irish Church had fallen into line, and it was not till 767 that they consented to celebrate Easter on the same day as the rest of the Christian world.[1]

Columba would sometimes summon the brethren to extra services: at dead of night his little bell would be heard calling them and they would hasten to the church, lighted on winter nights by their lanterns. This would happen when Columba had suddenly become aware that some one was in danger and required the prayers of the community; his trust in the power of prayer was absolute.

After the *alumni* had been duly instructed in the faith, the rite of baptism was administered. We hear of Columba baptizing children too on his travels, once of his baptizing a whole family (p. 98). The rites of burial were performed with great solemnity, for it was important to be buried among the redeemed. Columba once comforted an Irish penitent who had faithfully worked out his seven years' penance by saying, "Arise and be not sad. Thou shalt die in one of my monasteries, and thy lot shall be among my chosen monks in the kingdom and with them thou shalt awake from the sleep of death into the resurrection of life." The burial-place was regarded as the temporary home from which the dead were to rise at the resurrection into everlasting life. The rites lasted for three days and nights: hymns were then sung and the body buried with all due veneration to rise again "with lustrous and eternal brightness."

The monks had no personal property: everything was held in common. Although Columba had not the same tenderness of expression as Francis of Assisi, he,

[1] See p. 208.

too, recognized the purifying influence of poverty in worldly things, "since that is the celestial virtue whereby all things earthly and fleeting are trodden underfoot, and whereby all hindrances are lifted from the soul so that freely she may join herself to God Eternal." The brethren were also trained to great humility towards their superiors: they spoke to Columba on bended knee. But there were no extravagant ideas in Columba's rule which was governed by high ideals but also by a shrewd knowledge of human nature. His will was obeyed implicitly and at once, not so much because of the severe discipline of his Church, as because of the extreme affection his monks had for him. He was by nature a ruler of men, who inspired reverence and respect, who drew men to his side and constrained them to follow where he led, who captured the hearts of his monks. Though Columba went freely about among them, he spent much of his time in his own hut, studying, writing, and planning the future activities of his Church. We can picture him sitting in his hut, reflecting in the quiet peace of his island on the great truths he was to present to the people of northern Scotland. His glance would stray perhaps through the open door, out over the monastery to the sea and the everlasting hills beyond. The world was young then, the story of Christ was undimmed by the dust of ages, undistorted by those involved doctrines which centuries of argument and dispute have woven round the simple story of a pure life. The impression could be made in all its simplicity on the hearts of a people ready to believe in the unseen.

To sum up briefly the position of the Columban Church:—The monks of Iona submitted to the same rule as that practised by the monasteries of Ireland, a rule of religious observance, self-denial and self-rule to the extent of a reasonable asceticism. The doctrine of the Columban Church was identical with that of the whole Western Church before the fifth century. The

differences which developed between the churches of Ireland and Scotland and the rest of the Western Church after that date were largely owing to the fact that there was no longer any intercourse between Rome and Britain. The Columban Church remained the pure result of the "doctrines of the apostles and evangelists. It was not a retreat for solitaries, but rather a university of Christian education, to train and send forth missionaries to teach the heathen a better way of life and bring to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Although Columba and his monks were not solitaries, there is an ancient *Rule of Colum Cille* for anchorites, which gives an idea of the life and ideals of the monks of Iona. It is of a later date than Columba, but there is no doubt that it embodies his teaching.[1]

THE RULE OF COLUM CILLE BEGINNETH:

Be alone in a separate place near a chief city, if thy conscience is not prepared to be in common with the crowd.

Be always naked in imitation of Christ and the Evangelists.

Whatsoever little or much thou possessest of anything, whether clothing or food or drink, let it be at the command of the senior and at his disposal, for it is not befitting a religious to have any distinction of property with his own free brother.

Let a fast place with one door enclose thee.

A few religious men to converse with thee of God and his Testament, to visit thee on days of solemnity: to strengthen thee in the Testaments of God and the narratives of the Scriptures.

A person who would talk with thee in idle words, or of the world, or who murmurs at what he cannot remedy or prevent, but who would distress thee more, should he be a tattler between friend and foes, thou shalt not admit him to thee, but at once give him thy benediction, should he deserve it.

Let thy servant be a discreet religious, not tale-telling man, who is ready to attend continually on thee, with moderate labour of course, but always ready.

Yield submission to every rule that is of devotion.

A mind prepared for red martyrdom.

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[1] This Rule which is now in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, was first made accessible to the public by Dr Reeves.

A mind fortified and steadfast for white martyrdom.[1]

Forgiveness from the heart for everyone.

Constant prayers for those who trouble thee.

Fervour in singing the office for the dead, as if every faithful dead was a particular friend of thine.

Hymns for souls to be sung standing.

Let thy vigils be constant from eve to eve, under the direction of another person.

Three labours in the day—prayers, work and reading.

Thy work to be divided into three parts, thine own work and the work of thy place, as regards its real wants: secondly thy share of the brethren's work: lastly, to help the neighbours by instruction or writing or sewing garments or whatever labour they may be in want of, *ut Dominus ait*, "*Non apparebis ante me vacuus.*"

Everything in its proper order: *Nemo enim coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit.*

Follow almsgiving before all things.

Take not of food till thou art hungry.

Sleep not till thou feelest desire.

Speak not except on business.

Every increase which comes to thee in lawful meals, or in wearing apparel, give it for pity to the brethren that want it, or to the poor in like manner.

The love of God with all thy heart and all thy strength.

The love of thy neighbour as thyself.

Abide in the Testaments of God throughout all times.

Thy measure of prayer shall be until thy tears come;

Or thy measure of work of labour till thy tears come:

Or thy measure of thy work of labour, or of thy genuflexions until thy perspiration come often, if thy tears are not free.

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[1] Red martyrdom was to die for God: white martyrdom to live and suffer for him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONVERSION OF THE PICTS: COLUMBA'S CONTESTS WITH THE DRUIDS

In his *Life of Columba*, Adamnan brings before us a personality of commanding character and masterful impulses, belonging rather to the administrative than to the reflective type of the world's great men. In all his heart and soul a monk, Columba was devoted to the cause of which monasticism was in those days the principal instrument. He had come to Scotland for a career which his native country could not afford him. It is perhaps not unfair to say that his was too ardent a spirit, too intent upon his rights, to live at peace in a country where there were already so many monasteries: his was the spirit of the pioneer, his powers were those of the administrator and organizer: he was made to break up new ground rather than to work over that which had already been cultivated. In Scotland he had no rivals. The soil was virgin in the north-west for the propagation of Christianity, the court near Inverness was still heathen. Throughout the Highlands there were few Christians despite the antecedent labours of Ninian and the contemporary mission of Kentigern, which affected indeed other regions. Columba had a free hand and could shape his policy unhindered.

It was not long before his influence and that of his monks came to be felt. Mull lay on the other side of a narrow sound: rumours spread of the greatness of the Abbot of Iona, of his powers, of his holiness, of his great stature, of his commanding voice, and it was felt that a new force had come into the life of western Scotland. The monks, when they crossed the Sound

for wood or passed through Mull on their way to the mainland, spread the tidings of the new Gospel and excited the curiosity of the surrounding district in the settlement at Iona and in the work its abbot had set himself to do. There was a flavour of romance about the Columban monks; "a tale that is brought across tides, acquires a glitter that is brighter than any truth at home." [1]

The first two years after Columba and his monks landed at Iona were spent in establishing the monastery, in preparing the ground for crops, in organizing the little community, and in learning the language of the Picts. Most of the inhabitants of Iona—if not all of them—would be Dalriadic Scots, but some of them would be able to speak the dialect of the Picts and would help Columba to learn it, though for some years he went about the Highlands with an interpreter. In his first two years at Iona, Columba set himself also to strengthen the Church of the Scots of Argyll, who, though already converted when they left Ireland in the beginning of the century, had little ecclesiastical organization. They welcomed the new life given to their religion by the arrival of Columba whose fame had preceded him, and to whom they looked to deliver them from the oppression of King Brude. Columba and his monks nurtured this young Gaelic Church along with their pioneering labours for the conversion of the Picts.

Columba had another characteristic necessary to the successful missionary: he had a great love of travel. As soon as he had established his monastery and seen it in working order, he set out northwards for the fastnesses of heathenism. He seems already to have been known as a missionary by the people of that "rough and rocky country," now called Ardnamurchan. He wrought many miracles there, as well as in Lochaber and Loch Awe, many of them beneficent, like those of increasing the herd of some deserving poor man and

[1] Leslie, *Isle of Colum-Cille.*

giving another a snare with which to catch food for his wife and family.

But what of the nature of the Picts, what sort of people had Columba to work among? What was their religion, what were their beliefs, and who were their priests?

The Highlands of Scotland with their rugged grandeur, their hills and valleys, their lochs and streams were the very home of romance. Among so much natural beauty it was not to be wondered at that poetry and romance were inborn in the inhabitants who lived so near the heart of nature, that their eyes seemed able to penetrate material barriers and apprehend a spiritual world hidden from the Sassenach. Although in the sixth century the Picts of the Scottish Highlands were a warlike race, there dwelt beneath that fierce exterior a spark of genius which can best be described as the Celtic temperament. Cut off by natural causes from intercourse with his fellows, the Scottish Gael developed a distinctive nature. He was steeped in superstition, deeply romantic, passionately attached to his own land and chief, for whom he would gladly give his life. With this extreme bravery the Celt combined a most tender sentiment: hospitality was one of his greatest virtues, ranking as part of his religion. Warm-hearted, generous, impetuous, he was a lover of beauty with a natural tendency towards the intellectual and spiritual side of life: his quick perception and sympathy made for delicacy in his own feelings and his chivalrous nobility found expression in courtly manners. In the early centuries these graces were not yet developed, but the germ was there. Times were warlike: life was lightly valued: honour came before it then, as happily, in our own day. The Celt was above all an idealist, but he had the faults of his virtues. He was emotional, lacking in balance, in perseverance, and to some extent in patience, though it is difficult, looking to the achievements of the Celts, to regard them as incapable of building up an enduring state. For Ireland was Celtic to the back-

bone and in the four centuries from 400 to 900 A.D., Ireland was a centre of learning and religion—partly, no doubt, owing to the learned men of Gaul who took refuge there—and it was to the impulse of the Celtic spirit in Columba, that we owe the development of the Scottish nation.

The clan system was the basis of social life in early Scotland: the members of the clans were bound together by common interests, common danger of attack and death. But these tribal divisions gave rise also to feuds and battles, for the clans were passionately devoted to their own chiefs with whom, seeing that few strangers penetrated to their land they were nearly all related by ties of blood or fosterage—"the rivets in the armour of the Highlands."

Long before the coming of Christianity to Scotland, the inhabitants had a regular religious system: the necessity of religion, the worship of higher powers from a sense of need, seems to be inherent in every race, in every soul. The belief in and worship of gods is universal in the savage stage, and so, as a new faith always begins by adapting itself where it can to the rites and practices of the old, it follows that we cannot rightly understand Columba or his work, unless we know something of the early beliefs with which he had to contend. A hardy open-air race, the Picts were naturally nature-worshippers, their gods were the various powers of nature endowed with personalities which had to be conciliated, who evinced their pleasure or displeasure by sunshine and good harvests or by evil weather and poor crops. This system of nature-worship was of Aryan origin, and had been brought to Britain by the Celts. They saw in every beauty of nature a deity personified: the sun, the river, the fountain, the tree—each had its own rite, its own worship. Such beliefs are after all not very far removed from Christianity, which recognizes, behind every beneficent force of nature, proof and expression of the care of a Father for his children. It was an illusion, no doubt, to think that the well or the

tree contained a spirit, but it was only the primitive interpretation of a need for religion, which was groping its way in the dark. Our forefathers found in these gods an outlet in which their need for prayer and faith could satisfy itself, and it was not merely the well or tree they worshipped, it was the well or tree as it appeared to them, the dwelling-place of a deity whom they could propitiate by sacrifice and worship. Like us they felt the need of addressing themselves to a higher power. Another point to be remembered is that in early religion, belief was not of such supreme importance as it is now: a man's religion in the primitive ages consisted of a number of ritual acts which were fixed by public opinion and which constituted all he needed to do to propitiate his deity.

The people who lived in Britain before the Celts, used to erect great stone monuments to their dead. They believed that the spirits of the dead lived on, and that they must provide the most permanent dwelling they could as a home for them. So they erected great megaliths, dolmens, cromlechs or tumuli which served both as monuments and burial chambers. These stone circles and monuments have often been regarded as the Temples of the Druids, for the Druids, finding these great monuments already associated with religious observance, adapted them to their own uses.

The Druids Columba found in Scotland were not the least like the Druids of Cæsar or Pliny: they had little in common with the Druids of Gaul except their name. The derivation of the word has occupied many scholars: some have thought it to be derived from the Greek *Drus*, an oak, and though that explanation might apply to the Druids of Gaul, those of Ireland and Scotland were probably so-called from the old Irish *Drui*, wizard or from *dar-vid*, very wise. The Druids Columba had to contend with were magicians and diviners, medicine-men rather than priests; but they were more than medicine-men, they were the learned men of the land, the instructors and advisors of the chiefs. "They sat

in the seat of honour on the King's right hand and were consulted about every important matter: they were proficient in the 'science' of the time, which consisted in mastery over the unseen world."[1] They were the intermediaries between man and spiritual powers, they could raise clouds or mists, could bring down rain or fire or blood: they could drive a man insane by flinging a wisp of straw in his face: they could foretell coming events, going up on a high hill they could read the future in the clouds or stars. They practised divination by a yew-rod with Ogham words cut into it, by a wheel, by sneezing, by the flight of birds, the croaking of ravens, or the chirping of tame wrens. They could cast spells: they could render themselves invisible: they could give a potion which caused forgetfulness and could either protect from evil or deliver over to the powers of darkness. They believed in lucky and unlucky days, which were determined by the position of the moon. They used a form of tonsure and practised a heathen rite of baptism—which may be of later date and adapted from the Christian rite—with the object of dedicating the child thus baptized to the powers of evil or at least to their own particular deities. Although the Druids of Scotland did not practise human sacrifice, there is a tradition that a human victim would sometimes be buried alive under the foundations of a new building to keep evil spirits away from it. The legend of Oran in connection with the founding of Columba's monastery preserves this idea and is evidently of pagan origin. The Druids used large flat stones as their altars: so far as we know they had no images, and these stones are the only remains of their worship. Their rites were practised also within the circles of standing stones or at the cairns or cromlechs. Such circles were always places of great sanctity, and after the Druids ceased to use them, the Christian missionaries, knowing that these stones were connected in the minds of the people with

[1] Watson, "Celtic Church in its relations with Paganism," *Celtic Review*, Nov. 1915.

religious observance, held their services beside them. And so to our own day, the Gaelic for "Have you been to church?" is literally, "Have you been at the stones?"

Rain water and snow, coming direct from Heaven, were supposed to possess special healing powers, and the stone altars had hollows scooped out in which snow and rain could collect: the Druid performed his ritual ablutions in this water, with which he also sprinkled the people. The superstition of washing the face in May dew is a survival of this custom combined with the observances of Beltane.

The Celts divided their year into two parts, which were again sub-divided; and as, to their minds, night came before day and winter before summer, the first festival of the year was Samhain, which took place in the beginning of November. (Our Hallowe'en celebrations are directly descended from this pagan festival.) Samhain signified the end of summer and the beginning of winter, and its object was to help the powers and especially the Sun-God, the greatest power of Celtic heathenism, to battle successfully against the powers of darkness and blight during the winter. The kindling of the sacred fire or fire of purification was the first part of the festival. All the fires of the district having been put out, a great fire was built by the Druids, who recited incantations while they rubbed two pieces of wood together till they got a sacred flame, with which they lighted the bonfire built of sacred wood—rowan, oak, yew, mountain-ash, figwort or ivy. This fire, representing the sun, was intended to help the Sun-God to vanquish the powers of darkness. Sick persons would either walk sun-wise around the sacred fire, or pass quickly through it, that contact with its divine flame might cleanse them from their infirmity. Cattle were driven through the fire or between two sacred fires to render them immune from sorcery or disease: cakes baked or water heated at the sacred fires were supposed to possess healing powers. Blazing

logs were then carried from the fire to kindle the hearths of the people, and blessing came to every house that received the sacred fire. The Yule log probably originated in this way, the festival being combined with Christmas celebrations in Christian times.

The Samhain Festival was a wild scene of revels and dancing and masquerading, the people disguising themselves as animal spirits, corn spirits, and so on, that they might come nearer the powers they sought to propitiate for the coming year. Animals were sometimes sacrificed on the sacred fire: the roasted flesh was partaken of as a sort of sacrament, and carried powers of healing to those who tasted it, and even to those who smelt the fumes of the burning hide. Belief in the sacred fire persisted in the Scottish Highlands till within recent years: if disease broke out among the cattle or sheep of any farm a fire would be lighted by the chief men of the district, who rubbed wood together till it ignited; then, lighting a bonfire of turfs or peats, they drove the diseased animals through its dense smoke, or sprinkled them with water heated by its flames.

The winter half of the year was divided by a festival on February 1, but its special nature has been lost sight of in the observances of St Bridget's Day, which fell on the same date.

The Beltane Festival began the summer half of the year on May 1. The observances were much the same as those of Samhain, the sacred fire being kindled in the same way, but at Beltane the god of fertility had to be propitiated, and so the fire would be lighted round a tree or a pole adorned with leaves and branches. The people, decking themselves with flowers and leaves, danced and capered wildly round the fire, chanting incantations as they danced: the quicker the dance and livelier the song, the better were the prospects for the harvest and the general prosperity of the year. The dwellings also were decorated with leaves and branches that the god of growth might be gratified at the homage

paid him and be pleased to bless the land and send the increase. Ashes from the sacred fire were sprinkled over the fields, that the divine spirit of fire might protect the crops: cakes baked by the heat of the fire were rolled down a slope, in imitation of the sun's rotary course; if the cake broke on its journey, it boded ill to the person in whose name it was rolled; if it arrived intact at the foot of the slope, its owner might look forward to prosperity. Cakes were sometimes given to wild animals who preyed on the flocks, that contact with the sacred fire might cause them to mend their ways. Magic and mystical rites were performed beside wells and springs, as rain and dew were necessary for a successful harvest: a heavy dew on Beltane showed that the powers of fertility were favourable, and so the dew itself came to be credited with beneficent powers. It was probably at the Beltane Festival that mythical struggles between the gods of summer and winter were supposed to take place, between growth and blight, light and darkness. The union of two powers in "sacred marriage" was supposed to ensure fertility, and we trace a survival of this belief in the King and Queen of the May.

The summer half of the year was subdivided by the harvest festival of Lugnasadh on August 1, when thank-offerings for the increase were offered to the gods, and bonfires again played an important part in the festival.[1]

There was also a lighter side of Celtic superstition, the elves and "people of the fairy mansions," who lived in smooth green knolls, such as the Angels' Hill at Iona which has always been identified with supernatural beings. The belief in demons, phantoms, waterkelpies and waterbulls common to all northern religions was strong in the Picts who believed their country to be peopled by myriads of spirits both good

[1] For further guidance in this subject see Dr MacCulloch's *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, or his articles in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, to all of which I am much indebted.

and evil. The atmosphere of those days was "thick with demons," to whose agency all natural phenomena such as winds, illnesses, and accidents, were ascribed. The legends of St Patrick and St Columba expelling serpents from their islands, refer to all powers of evil, as malignant spirits were supposed to appear in all sorts of terrifying forms. The whole early Church recognized demons as enemies they had to fight, and Columba regarded them just as seriously as the Druids did, only he knew his God could overcome them. Though he believed in demons, he applied the belief differently from the natives: he regarded the former gods of the land as malignant devils, but he did not ask the people to deny them, he only asked them to believe that they were less powerful than the God of the Christians, who was able to overcome every other power. And the people, accustomed to a religion of magic and sorcery, valued Christianity all the more that it also undertook to overcome evil spirits.

Columba sought to graft the new religion on the observances of the old; he did not attempt to change it altogether, and the old superstitions died hard, for even after his converts were nominally Christians they still cherished a belief in witchcraft, although they conceded that the power of God was supreme. The Druids naturally opposed the new faith which condemned their practices and threatened their commanding position; and in order to grapple the better with superstition, the early Christians claimed for their priests too a command of magical powers, employed chiefly to confound the Druids who boasted that their gods were stronger than the God of the Christians. Columba disproved that assertion: he did not deny that the Druids possessed supernatural powers through their nature gods, but he claimed the same powers in greater degree by the help of his God; and so when he beat the Druids with their own weapons, the people believed that God had sent his angels to help the Saint.

When Columba came to Scotland he knew that the

Druids were the real power he had to conquer: he recognized that he must discredit their influence and put himself and his followers in their place as the learned men of the land, the advisers of the people, of the chiefs, and of King Brude. In those days of tribes and clans, no headway could be made among the people unless their chief approved, for the people depended on their chiefs for protection and were loyally devoted to them. Columba could make no impression on the minds of the people until he had won over King Brude to his cause. And so, about two years after his arrival in Iona, Columba set out to seek King Brude in his northern fastness. While his chief purpose was to win Brude over to his cause, he wished also to have his possession of Iona confirmed. Like a wise statesman he did not go alone to confront the king, for Columba was a member of that race which had angered Brude by encroaching on his territory. He took with him Comgall and Cainnech who, because they were Irish Picts, were likely to be regarded with favour by the king of the Scottish Picts, and who knew the language Columba had only begun to learn.

Comgall was, next to St Patrick himself, the greatest leader of monasticism in Ireland. He also had studied under Finnian of Clonard; Columba and he had been fellow-students at Glasnevin. It was in 558 that Comgall founded his great monastery at Bangor-of-the-crested-peaks (Co. Down), where he ruled over several thousand monks; and now, seven years later, he had sailed over to Scotland to visit Columba and to ask Brude, on his own behalf, to sanction certain missions he intended to found in Northern Scotland.

Cainnech, or Kenneth as he is known in Scotland, had studied as a youth under St Cadoc in Wales. He had then gone to Rome, and on his return from Italy had been a fellow-student of Columba and Comgall at Clonard and Glasnevin. He and Columba were deeply attached to each other: there are many stories of their friendship, how they thought of each other when they

were far apart, each working in his own monastery (we have read the story of how "Cainnech's swift running to the church with a single shoe greatly profited Columba"). Cainnech stayed for many years in Scotland where, with the exception of Columba and Bridget, more churches are dedicated to him than to any other saint. He was of a lovable disposition, he liked quiet places where he could think and study alone, and his preaching was famous for its "simple eloquence." He was a scholar too, and wrote a commentary on the Gospels, much admired by Columba. The little island of Inch-Kenneth which lies off Mull about fifteen miles north of Iona, was called after Cainnech, who is thought to have founded the church there.

These were the two men, friends of his youth, whom Columba chose to accompany him on his mission to King Brude. Both of them were impressed by the power and greatness of Columba, and believed he had been specially set apart by God for his work in Scotland. For once in their student days when they were all three together in a church on Lambay Island off the Dublin coast, Comgall suggested that Columba "should make the offering of the body and blood of Christ in their presence. Colum Cille obeyed them regarding that. And it was then that Cainnech saw a fiery column over Colum Cille's head while he was engaged in the offering."[1]

We can picture the three friends sailing north from Iona in their coracle, past Mull and Lismore, and then proceeding on foot over the rough and rocky ground of Ardnamurchan. There were many dangers to face, both by land and sea, but these three were strong in the faith of God, and in their mutual love and friendship: they went forward boldly, their pastoral staffs in their hands, across the wilds of Caledonia. "It is hardly necessary to say that Columba bore other arms besides those of pure truth. As he appears in the pages of Adamnan, Columba is in fact half-Druid magician, half-Christian missionary, ready as occasion arises to fight his adver-

[1] From the Life contained in the *Leabar Breac*.

saries with their own weapons. . . . Moreover, the Saint had doubtless other words to speak to King Brude than the simple statement of the principles of the Christian religion. To the close of his career he was deep in all the politics of his time, and if not at this moment, he was later the powerful intermediary between the kings of Ireland, Dalriada, and Pictland." [1]

Columba wished not only to have his tenure of Iona made sure, but to ask that the Scots might again occupy those islands from which they had been driven out by Brude's campaign against them. He wished to enlarge his own sphere of usefulness to these outlying islands, so that it was in truth as statesman as well as missionary that he went to the court of the Picts.

After many days travel the Saints arrived at the castle of King Brude on the shores of Loch Ness. Adamnan gives us a spirited account of what happened: "Brude, elated by the pride of royalty, acted haughtily and would not open his gates on the first arrival of the blessed man. When the man of God observed this, he approached the folding doors with his companions and having first formed upon them the sign of the Cross of our Lord, he then knocked at and laid his hand upon the gate, which instantly flew open of its own accord, the bolts having been driven back with great force. The Saint and his companions then passed through the gates, thus speedily opened. And when the King learned what had occurred, he and his councillors were filled with alarm, and immediately setting out from the palace, he advanced to meet with due respect the blessed man whom he addressed in the most conciliating and respectful language. And ever after from that day, so long as he lived, the King held this holy and reverend man in high honour as was due." (II. xxxvi.)

The Irish *Lives* tell a slightly different story, but from the combined edifice of legend and miracle we can reconstruct what really happened: the fame of Columba and his companions, their impressive appearance and

[1] Hume Brown, *History of Scotland*, p. 16.

commanding personalities, disarmed the fear and suspicion of Brude and his followers, so that Brude caused the gates and doors to be thrown open to admit them. But he still grasped his trusty sword in case of danger. Then, when the mild Cainnech advanced and made the sign of the Cross over his hand in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Brude, who had been brought up to fear the wrath of gods made angry by disrespect, obeyed his instinct of submission to unseen powers and laid aside his sword. He had heard nothing but good of Columba and his followers: although the Druids hated them and saw they were striking at the foundations of Druidical power, yet all the deeds of the Christians, miraculous and otherwise, had been of beneficent intent. We can well imagine that an atmosphere of holiness and purity would surround these three men who had forsaken everything to follow Christ and spread his Gospel: such men in our own day have quelled savage kings and tribes, unarmed save by the power of the message they bore. Why not also in the days of Columba?

But though Brude was well disposed towards Columba, not so the Druids of his court. We hear of a number of contests with druidism, every expulsion of a demon from a milk-pail or any other lurking-place being regarded as a victory for the new faith. Columba performed feats in providing fair winds for his followers: the Druids performed similar feats, but Columba beat them at their own tricks. One of the most famous of these incidents was when Columba overcame the Druid Broichan and sailed against the wind. Broichan was Brude's foster-father, teacher, adviser, and chief magician, the Arch-Druid of his court, so that the contest of power between him and Columba was of vital importance to Columba's mission: had he failed it would have meant a serious check to his work in Scotland. Broichan also knew that his position was challenged, and so both were on their mettle. Whilst conversing with Columba Broichan said:

"Tell me, Columba, when dost thou propose to sail?"

"I intend to begin my voyage in three days," Columba answered, "if God permits me and preserves my life."

"On the contrary," said Broichan, "thou shalt not be able, for I can make the winds unfavourable to thy voyage and cause a great darkness to envelope thee in its shade."

"The almighty power of God," observed Columba, "ruleth all things, and in His name and under His guiding providence all our movements are directed."

"Then the Druids began to exult, seeing that it had become dark and that the winds were violent and contrary. . . . Our Columba therefore, seeing that the sea was violently agitated and the wind most unfavourable, called on Christ the Lord and embarked in his small boat; whilst the sailors hesitated, he the more confidently ordered them to raise the sails against the wind. No sooner was this order executed . . . than the vessel ran against the wind with extraordinary speed. And after a short time, the wind, which hitherto had been against them, veered round to help them on their voyage to the astonishment of all. And thus throughout the remainder of that day, the light breeze continued favourable and the skiff of the blessed man was carried safely to the wished-for haven." (II., xxxv.)

Having thus confounded Broichan, the head of all the Druids, Columba's fame increased, the people being deeply impressed by the power of the God who could overcome the magic of the Arch-Druid. Columba came of a seafaring race, the sea held few secrets for him, and when we are told he sailed against the wind, it is probable he beat up against it, or saw the breeze was changing, or calculated how the tidal current would help his craft, an art he would learn to perfection in the swift-running tides of the Sound of Iona. The old Irish eulogy of Columba, the *Amhra Columcille* favours this view: "Seasons and storms he perceived, that is

he used to understand when calm and storm would come—he harmonized the moon's co-circle in regard to course—he perceived its race with the branching sun and sea-courses, that is, he was skilful in the course of the sea, he would count the stars of heaven."

Columba's next contest with Broichan was when he asked him to set free a girl slave who belonged to the Scots colony. Broichan obstinately refused to part with her, and Columba's ire was aroused. "Know, O Broichan!" he exclaimed, "and be assured that if thou refuse to set this captive free thou shalt die suddenly before I take my departure again from this province!" Columba and his followers then left the court and began their journey south along the banks of the river Ness. While they were resting for a few minutes beside a clear pool, Columba, seeing a small white pebble in the stream, bent down and picked it up. Holding it out to his companions he said, "Behold this white pebble by which God will effect the cure of many diseases among this heathen nation. . . ." He then went on to foretell how at that moment Broichan had been struck by an angel, so that the glass cup out of which he had been drinking had been broken in many pieces. Columba added that he would wait there for the two messengers, who were even at that moment being sent after him in haste, to ask him to return and save the dying Broichan. Shortly afterwards the two messengers arrived and told all that had happened at court, just as Columba had predicted. The Saint immediately sent off two of his monks with the white pebble which he had blessed, and a message that Broichan must first promise to set the maiden free, then at once immerse the pebble in water, and drink from it, when he should instantly be cured—"but if he break his vow and refuse to liberate her, he shall die that instant." All Columba's instructions were obeyed, and when the pebble was immersed in water, "in a wonderful manner and contrary to the laws of nature, it floated on the water like a nut or an apple, nor, as it had been blessed by the holy man, could it be

submerged. Broichan drank of this water and instantly returning from the verge of death recovered his perfect health and soundness of body." (II., xxxiv.)

This white pebble was preserved as a certain cure for all diseases—the amulet was a favourite resource of Celtic heathenism—because it had been blessed by Columba, who thus again beat Broichan with his own weapons. He had threatened him with death; then when he became ill and was about to die, he had cured him, showing King Brude and the natives that the God of the Christians was the superior power.

Although these are the only two contests with Broichan on record, they were sufficient to dislodge him from his position and perhaps to give Brude the idea of making Columba his *soul-friend* or confessor, instead of Broichan. But there were other contests with Druidical power. While Columba was still at the court of Inverness, he and his friends had retired one night to their own quarters outside the king's fortifications and had begun as usual to chant the evening hymns. The Druids tried by their uproar to prevent the hymns being heard. But Columba began to sing the 45th Psalm, *My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter*, and "so wonderfully loud, like pealing thunder, did his voice become, that king and people were struck with terror and amazement." This powerful voice was one of Columba's chief characteristics and was not without influence on the Druids and their followers, who regarded it as a gift direct from heaven. The *Leabar Breac* writes of it:

> The sound of the voice of Colum Cille
> Great was its sweetness above all clerics:
> To the end of fifteen hundred paces,
> Though great the distance, it was distinctly heard.

It was said that when Columba was scolding some unfortunate monk who had incurred his displeasure on Iona, his voice could be distinctly heard across the Sound in Mull. That is not impossible; with certain favourable conditions one can hear in Iona, the shepherds

calling their dogs in Mull. But in Celtic heathenism the loudness and carrying power of the voice was ascribed to miraculous causes.

While he was still in the country of the Picts, Columba learnt one day that he was near one of the famous wells which the people worshipped as the dwelling-place of a deity. It must have been a malignant deity, for those who drank of its waters or washed in it went away "leprous or purblind or suffering from some infirmity." Columba went fearlessly to the well, the Druids rejoicing to see him go, for they thought if only he touched the poisonous water, some hurt would come to him. Then they would be vindicated and rid of this Christian who threatened not only their power but their livelihood. Columba made the saving sign of the Cross over the well and invoked the name of Christ: having thus "sained" it, he washed his hands and feet and then with his companions drank of the water he had blessed. "And from that day the demons departed from the fountain, and not only was it not allowed to injure anyone but even many diseases among the people were cured by this same fountain after it had been blessed by the Saint." (II., x.) That is a typical instance of Columba's method, by which he made the Picts regard the powers of nature as friends instead of enemies; he carried on the beliefs of heathenism, having first blessed and sained them with the Christian symbol of the Cross.

We know of one other contest with Druidical power: the bringing back to life of a boy apparently dead, a feat which created a great impression in favour of the new religion. "Now there was biding in the country a certain man to whom Columb Cille preached, and he with all his household believed in the Lord. The Devil was envious of that thing, so he smote yon man's son with a sore disease whereof he died. The heathen were reviling Columb Cille. Thereafter Columb went in fervent prayer to God and He raised the son out of death." The Druids tried to persuade the people that their nature gods had revenged themselves on the

father for becoming a Christian, by taking the life of his son; and when by Columba's prayers the son was restored to life the Picts regarded it as an extraordinary miracle: by it Columba showed forth again the supreme power of his God over life and death, how He was more powerful than the gods of the Druids, how there was nothing He could not do.

It was not therefore by sweeping away the old beliefs that Columba planted Christianity in Scotland: he had found this well credited with supernatural powers and he left it credited with supernatural powers, but now of a beneficent nature. In the same way because the Druids had always held their worship at cairns and sacred stones, Columba held services for the worship of God at these already sacred spots. His method of converting the Picts was the same which approved itself in later years to Gregory the Great, who wrote to an Abbot about to set out for Britain in 601, ". . . if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God: that the nation, seeing their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God may the more freely resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. . . . He who endeavours to ascend to the highest place rises by degrees or steps, not by leaps." [1]

Columba naturally met with fierce opposition from the Druids, whose position he was assailing, but they had a wholesome respect for his powers and the powers of his Deity, and never seem to have attempted to do him bodily harm. Of his early miracles in the country of the Picts, the greater part were performed "in order to confound the Druids and glorify God." In this his miracles and those of other early Celtic saints differ from the usual type, which are generally based on the miracles of the Gospels. Columba had to prove himself by different methods. It was his business "to outdo the Druids on their own ground: the sort of miracle

[1] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I., xxx.

demanded of him was the sort of miracle which the Druids, in the estimation of the people, could alone perform. . . . The point was to convince rulers and people that anything whatever possible to a Druid by means of his magic science could be done and outdone by the man who believed in Christ and acted in His name. . . . He who believes in Christ has no need of resorting to a Druid to buy his protection by means of spell or charm. The power of Christ working for him is effectual, when His name is invoked, to put evil spirits to flight and secure all other good things.

" 'Christ is my illuminator, my prophet, my guide, and my instructor.' "[1]

[1] Watson, "Celtic Church in its relations with Paganism." *Celtic Review*, Nov. 1915.

CHAPTER IX

THE GRAFTING OF CHRISTIANITY ON CELTIC HEATHENISM

ADAMNAN tells us disappointingly little about the conversion of the Picts. He is in this like other historians of the early Christians. They do not aim at supplying posterity with information about the state of the world anterior to its conversion to Christianity. The pagan rites and beliefs were in their eyes pure darkness and devilry which ought not to be preserved or remembered but rather hidden in utter oblivion. All writers on the early society and religion of the northern nations complain of this: the Church writers could have told so much and do actually tell so little. The earliest histories we possess, that of the Admirable Bede for example, tell us of a world from which everything not Christian has altogether vanished. Monasteries are the centre of society, the monks have it all their own way, everything is judged or condemned according to the relation in which it stands to their system.

But we have penetrated a little through the darkness. We have seen how nature worship reigned in Scotland before Christianity, and how the Druids with their occult rites terrorized the credulous Celts. Columba had stormed the strongest citadel of heathenism when he made friends with Brude and his court, when he vanquished Broichan and the Druids in their contests of power. It was partly owing to the clan system that Brude's subjects were ready to accept the Saint and his message because their chief had accepted him, partly because Columba's God had been proved greater than the gods of the Druids. We do not know whether King Brude was baptized, we do not know indeed

whether he became a Christian, but we do know that he was a good friend to Columba, who soon obtained confirmation of the grant of Iona for his monastery. The surrounding islands were put at his disposal as time went on, granted to him and his monks no doubt in gratitude for the blessings of peace and civilization they brought to north-west Scotland.

Seeing that Columba too believed in superstition and miraculous intervention, there was little real conflict between the new faith and the old.[1] Celtic heathenism was not uprooted, it was only modified, and as there was no violent upheaval, many heathen practices were carried over into the Christian Church: the Christians altered the point of view which governed them, the sign of the Cross "sained" them and they were thus adapted to the new faith. As Columba appropriated the places of worship the Druids had used, it seems probable that the lands and property of the Druids ultimately fell into the hands of the Christian missionaries who supplanted them. When a Highland chief was convinced that the Christians had more power and knowledge than the Druids, and when he adopted the Christian as his adviser, he would naturally make over to him any lands or moneys the Druid had held in respect of his office. And so with spiritual things: the Christians fell heir to many practices and rites of Celtic heathenism.

In order to understand the atmosphere in which Columba lived let us glance briefly at some of the ancient superstitions.

One of the chief rites of Celtic heathenism was that of turning sunwise or *Deasil* (from *dess*, right hand). Originally a form of sun-worship it was adopted by the early Christians, who performed it before any solemn event, to propitiate God. The rite is known to have been practised at Iona on Michaelmas Day, when every human being and all the animals on the island

[1] **It is instructive that Irish Christianity, the parent of Scottish Christianity, has no martyrs.**

walked sunwise round the Angels' or Fairies' Hill to bring a blessing on the island for the coming year. And the fishermen at Colonsay used to turn their boats sunwise to bring good luck to their fishing and would walk three times sunwise round the church to ensure a safe return. It is still considered unlucky to turn a boat contrary to the direction of the sun, and we may be sure that when Columba's coracle threaded its way in among the rocks at Port-na-Churaich, the monks turned it sunwise. For when Columba sailed from Loch Foyle, he blessed a stone by the water's brink, and made a circuit round it sunwise; "from that stone it was he went into his boat. And he said whoever made a circuit round the stone going on a journey or pilgrimage would likely arrive in safety." It used to be the practice at funerals to carry the coffin three times round the churchyard sunwise to ensure peaceful rest to the departed. The reverse of this practice—Widderschynnes—was considered unlucky. The old hand-quern for grinding corn was so arranged that it revolved sunwise with perfect smoothness, but if turned in the opposite direction would only go round with difficulty. The deasil superstition has come down to us as a daily one; we see it in the practice of passing the wine round the table in the direction of the sun, or in the fears of the cook that her pudding will be spoiled if someone stirs it the wrong way. In olden times, when the Scots cakes or bannocks were made on the palm of the hand, the thumb of the right hand would be turned sunwise through the centre of the bannock to keep evil influences away from it. The *Fire-Round*, that is carrying fire round a mother and her newly-born child—a relic of pagan sun- or fire-worship—used to be practised until the child was baptized and thus finally given over to God, who would protect it from the powers of evil. Martin relates that during his voyage to the Western Isles of Scotland about 1695, the people performed three rounds sunwise about the persons of their benefactors, blessing them and wishing good success to all their enterprises. "I

had this ceremony paid me in Islay," he says, "by a poor woman after I had given her alms." And St Columba's *Cathach* or Battle-Psalter used to be carried three times sunwise round the army of his kinsmen before they joined battle.

The Celtic heathen belief that wells and springs were the dwelling-place of a water deity was carried on by the Christians as we have seen in the case of Columba; they were put under the protection of some local saint, who thus supplanted the nature god or local divinity of paganism. Churches and monasteries were generally built beside wells or rivers because water was considered holy and was used to baptize the converts. The utilitarian reason of the convenience of the community would also no doubt be considered. Even after the wells were Christian, the old custom of the propitiation of the deity continued, gifts were thrown into the wells or tied to surrounding trees till the beauty of every well was marred by these unlovely evidences of faith and gratitude. The deasil ceremony was often performed round a sacred well by a sick person who came to be cured, thus uniting two rites and strengthening the chance of recovery. The brink of water was a place of revelation, and as the Druids used to divine by wave-knowledge, Columba practised it too. When Cainnech asked him, "What sings the wave to-day?" Columba replied by a prophecy which did indeed come true. The moaning of the sea was held to signify the sympathy of the sea-god, Manannan, with the sick or dying; poets could interpret the angry roaring of his breakers and prophesy by the gentle lapping of his waves. South-running water was considered specially beneficent. Any contract made by clasping hands over running water was sacred and inviolable, and so came to be a usual form of plighting troth. At Iona, the Fount of Youth, *Tobar na-h-Aois* on the northern slope of Dun-I, was credited with the power of restoring her youth to any woman who bathed her face and hands in it before sunrise on Midsummer Day. The Cradle

of the North Wind, *Tobar na Gaoith Tuaith*, a long flat slab (now at the main door of the Abbey of Iona) hollowed out on the top to hold water, was resorted to by mariners about to set sail on a voyage for which they wished a north wind: they stirred the water gently with their fingers, repeating some incantation. There was also a Well of the South Wind, but its place is now unknown.

Offering the gods gifts of food was a common way of craving their favour, and this pagan custom persisted long into Christian times. At Iona till the end of the eighteenth century, on the midnight before Maundy Thursday the *Great Gruel* was thrown into the sea at Machar, that the sea in return might cast up sufficient sea-weed to manure the land for the ploughing. "As day merged from Wednesday to Thursday, a man walked out into the sea up to his waist and poured out the offering of gruel, chanting his incantation:

> O God of the sea
> Put weed in the drawing-wave
> To enrich the ground,
> To shower on us food." [1]

Then all the people took up the tale, singing the stave.

The worship of sacred trees was also carried on by the Christians, who believed that spirits lived in them. The rowan tree was a protection against evil spirits, and sometimes rowan branches formed into a rude cross were nailed above the house door to prevent evil spirits coming in. Mistletoe, the life or sap of the oak, was used for magic rites: the birch was one of the trees of paradise, the ivy and bramble were sacred, the bramble because Christ was supposed to have used a bramble stick to encourage the ass He rode into Jerusalem and to drive the money-changers out of the temple. St John's Wort, Colum Cille's own flower, if accidentally found was believed to ward off enchantment. But in order to be effective it had to be worn

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I., 163.

under the armpit, for that was how the blessed Colum Cille himself carried it. The following incantation would be repeated before plucking it, by those seeking its protection:

Plantlet of Columba,
Without seeking, without searching,
Plantlet of Columba,
Under my arm for ever!

For luck of men,
For luck of means,
For luck of wish,
For luck of sheep,
For luck of goats,
For luck of birds,
For luck of fields,
For luck of shell-fish,
For luck of fish,
For luck of produce and kine,
For luck of progeny and people,
For luck of battle and victory,
On land, on sea, on ocean,
Through the Three on high,
Through the Three a-nigh,
Through the Three Eternal,
Plantlet of Columba,
I cull thee now,
I cull thee now.[1]

The early Christians could not free themselves from the pagan belief in supernatural monsters who would carry off any human being they could catch. Witches and even some unfortunate ordinary mortals were believed to possess the power of casting the evil eye, a superstition common to all countries and every age, and for protection against which the following charm came to be used:

I appeal to Mary, Aidful mother of men,
I appeal to Bride, Foster-mother of Christ-omnipotent,
I appeal to Columba, Apostle of shore and sea,

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, II., 101.

And I appeal to heaven,
To all saints and angels that be above.[1]

Sympathetic magic was practised: an effigy was made in clay or wax of the person it was desired to harm: whatever injury was inflicted on the effigy was supposed to pass to the original. A favourite way of accomplishing this end was to lay a wax effigy near a fire, when it slowly melted away and the original was supposed to die of some lingering disease. The victims of that credulous age were equally superstitious and were often seriously or even fatally affected by this form of mental suggestion. The practice could also be used for good, and this was its Christian form; a wax arm or leg was hung up in some holy place that the diseased limb might be cured.

The gift of the second sight was one of the most important beliefs of the Celts. Columba himself had this power, which was described by Adamnan as the "divine gift of prophecy." Many of his miracles were performed by its help, and his possession of a faculty which ranked high in the estimation of the natives, helped him rapidly to gain their respect. Columba recognized that he possessed this gift when he said, "Heaven has granted to some to see on occasion in their minds clearly and surely, the whole of earth and sea and sky." The stories of his prophetic powers are countless, and show that his gifts were sometimes used for the useful purposes of everyday life. Once when he and his friends were staying beside Lough Key in Roscommon, his companions were anxious to go out fishing. But Columba dissuaded them. "'No fish will be found in the river to-day or to-morrow,' he said, 'but on the third day I will send you and you shall find two large river salmon taken in the net.' And so after two days they cast their nets and landed two salmon of most extraordinary size which they found in the river which is named the Boyle." (II., xix.)

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, II., 49.

Seventh sons were held to be specially gifted with the second sight and with the power of curing disease: so was a child born on the stroke of midnight. Certain families could cure certain diseases, and these powers descended from generation to generation. A posthumous child was able to effect cures simply by allowing its eyes to rest on the patient. It was believed that sight could be restored by moistening the eyes of the blind with the spittle of some holy man: this cure was wrought by Finnian of Moville when he sained the eye that had been plucked out by Columba's crane. The four-leafed clover was another remedy for defective vision. Illnesses were sometimes cured by mystical words or numbers: the number 3 with its square and cube, 9 and 9 tripled, were the chief mystical numbers of Scotland. There was, as we have seen, a belief in amulets or curing stones: the transparent green pebbles to be found at Port-na-Churaich were believed to preserve whosoever carried them from drowning. Casting knots was another superstition commonly used against disease: the lovers knot which came from this custom was the symbol of everlasting friendship.

There were many superstitions connected with salt, for the devil was supposed to abhor it: a few grains thrown on the fire carried away any lurking evil power in the blue flame: put in the mouth of an infant it was a protection against powers of darkness; thrown over the left shoulder it prevented a quarrel (this probably came from the spilling of the salt between Christ and Judas at the Last Supper); laid on the chest of the dead it protected from the power of evil spirits. These beliefs were known to Columba and probably influenced him, he knew at any rate that they influenced the people. One of his monks had a sister who suffered from inflamation of the eyes, and the Saint gave him a lump of salt, which he had blessed, to take to her. She hung it up over her bed, and though the whole village was destroyed by fire, yet "in order that the gift of the blessed man might not be destroyed, that portion of

the wall from which the salt was suspended, still stood uninjured after the rest of the house had been burned down." (II., vii.)

Certain animals were regarded as specially holy, others as belonging to the powers of darkness. The toad was an evil creature, the companion of witches and sorcerers: the raven was the bringer of bad luck, and a flock of ravens denoted the near presence of an evil spirit. The cock was buried alive as a cure for insanity, and all evil spirits had to fly away when the cock crew. Cock-crowing at an unusual time was an ill-omen; this was of course a Christian addition from the story of Peter's shame when the cock crew. The dog was an important animal in the mythology of the Celts, so were the boar and wild sow, which if not actually worshipped were at least regarded with reverence. The cat was of great importance in occult ceremonies: its tenacity of life, its faculty for falling on its feet, its power of dilating its pupils, all marked it out as an animal of mystical powers. To avert evil from those about to enter a house of sinister repute, a cat was thrown into it before the new occupants took possession: if evil had been left in the house, the cat sickened and died, having received the evil into itself and removed it by its death. A golden butterfly seen near the house of a dying person was regarded as an angel come to carry the departing soul to heaven.

Colours had special significance attached to them. Yellow was the favourite colour of the Celts: a fine day would be described as a yellow day, and contentment was expressed in the same way, a man was yellow, that is, satisfied. Red or yellow hair was greatly admired. Black as the colour of Satan was avoided, and black cats and dogs were unlucky, being emissaries of the devil. It was unlucky to chase away a black animal, as Satan would take his revenge for any incivility. Red cows were considered more lucky than white, and the milk of cows all of one colour was thought to possess special virtues. Animals with certain markings, "a

red cow with a white head, or a white cow with red ears," and so on, were supposed to have special virtues.[1]

Fasting was known even in pagan times: men fasted when they asked their nature gods, the *Tuatha De Danann*, for special gifts, just as in our own day, men fast before God. As the Christians dislodged the Druids from their position and to a certain extent occupied it themselves, they were expected to carry on the practices of the Druids, and among other things to detect and punish crime. In this way Columba's gift of the second sight brought him a great reputation: as O'Donnell says, "It was well for him that had the blessing of Columcille and ill for him that had his curse." We can understand what a terror he was to evil-doers, when he could instantly detect their sins. And he was not slow to expose them. Once when he was in Meath he was spending the Lord's Day in a humble little monastery. The monks, wishing that everything should be done with the utmost reverence and dignity before their distinguished guest, chose a certain priest to celebrate the Eucharist, because he was thought to be a very good man. But no sooner had he begun the solemn service than Columba pronounced this fearful sentence: "The clean and the unclean are now equally mingled together: that is, the clean mysteries of the holy sacrifice are offered by an unclean person who just now conceals within his own conscience a grievous crime!" The bystanders, hearing these words, were struck with terror, but he of whom they were said, was forced to confess his sin. (I., xxxii.)

The Druids had been famed, too, for the power of their maledictions, and these the Christian saints carried on with only too great relish and satisfaction. Both curses and blessings were considered to act better when pronounced from a height, that they might descend with full force on the fortunate or unfortunate being to whom they were addressed. And so when we read of Columba's violent denunciations of sinners, we must

[1] Introduction to Plummer's *Vitæ Sanctorum Hiberniæ*.

remember that maledictions were expected of him, were in fact duties pertaining to his office. It does strike one forcibly on reading his prophecies in Adamnan, that many of them are of a fatal character. Columba is very free in predicting the death of those who have transgressed the moral law. Peter's action to Ananias and Sapphira is multiplied many times in this strange chronicle. The more grateful is the contrast when we find him taking a journey to visit an aged heathen of whom he has heard a good report, or forgiving the prying curiosity of a brother who has played the spy on him in one of his interviews with angels, or helping a young attendant who is in difficulties, a devil having got into his milk-pail.

The Picts, who regarded Columba as a superior sort of medicine-man, attributed magical properties to his bell and *bachall* or pastoral staff (in his case merely a long stick with a crook for handle). The belief that anything blessed or touched by the Saint was holy and could work miracles, survived Columba. One summer after his death when Iona had been visited by long-continued drought, the monks, fearing their crops would be ruined and the island left destitute of food, resolved that some of the Seniors should walk sunwise round a ploughed and sowed field, taking with them Columba's white tunic and some manuscripts written by his own hand: that they should "raise in the air and shake three times the tunic which the Saint wore at the hour of his death, and that they should open the books and read them on the little Hill of the Angels, where the citizens of the heavenly country were occasionally seen to descend at the bidding of the blessed man. When these directions had been executed . . . the sky, which during the preceding months of March and April had been cloudless, was suddenly covered with dense vapours that rose from the sea with extraordinary rapidity: copious rain fell day and night, and the parched earth being sufficiently moistened produced its fruits in good season and yielded an abundant harvest." (II., xlv.)

The incantations of the Druids, which had been used as charms to keep away evil spirits, were followed by the hymns of the Christians used for a similar purpose: they were recited to provide protection for a journey, and to bring blessing on the various occupations of everyday life.[1] Columba and his monks, in short, fell heirs to the mantle of the Druids and were endowed, in the minds of that credulous age, with all the magical powers the Druids had claimed.

Pagan and Christian ideas regarding the future state seem on the surface to have had some affinity: the early Christians spoke of a *Land of Promise*, a term adopted from Celtic heathenism, which spoke also of a *Land of Light*, a *Land of the Ever-Living*, and a *Land of the Ever-Young*. The pagan heaven of the poetic and romantic Celt was a place where no one ever grew old, a land of beauty beyond compare, sometimes supposed to be below the depths of the sea—a *Land under the Waves*—sometimes on a beautiful *Island of Joy* far out in the boundless ocean, sometimes below one of the green knolls known to Celtic superstition as *Fairy Mansions*. These *Abodes of the Blest* were peopled only by fairies, a few favoured human beings might reach them, but they were invited during life, and only those of the inner vision would see the messenger and hear the call. The old Celtic tales give ravishing accounts of the beauty of these abodes. Borrowed from the delight which the Celt took in music, is the recurring reference to the marvellous music which everywhere

[1] Mr Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, from which I have been permitted to quote, is a collection of such hymns and songs gathered together from oral tradition by Mr Carmichael on his journeys through Scotland and the Hebrides. His devotion and enthusiasm have preserved for us many of these beautiful hymns, which would otherwise have died out, and which give invaluable insight into the later superstitions of the Highlands, showing that while they are derived both from paganism and Christianity, they practically all spring from religious sources.

swells in Elysium. "It sounds from birds on every tree, from marvellous stones, from the harps of divine musicians, . . . and lulls to forgetfulness the favoured mortals invited thither." [1] This belief in the *Land of the Ever-Young* is still held in parts of Ireland and in the Scottish Hebrides where, we are told, certain islands, and certain mysterious fairy mounds on the mainland, send messengers to call those who visit them to the land of music and beauty and eternal youth.[2]

The early Christians, while they also believed in a kingdom of peace where there was neither sin nor discord, differed from the pagans in regarding this delectable country as the reward of every true believer, *after death*: they "sained" the pagan belief by the doctrine of salvation through Christ, and so adapted many of its beautiful features to the Christian religion.

Out of all the superstitions of the early Celts there grew up a vast edifice of tradition and folklore which forms one of our most valuable guides to the customs of those times. Before the days of books or newspapers, there was an age of story-telling, when the bards—the poets and learned men—would repeat the great national traditions and embroider new romances full of weird beings and daring adventure. The bards recited their compositions, using the harp for serious themes, the pipe for those that were mirthful. They sometimes sang their romances to traditional melodies, and this was the origin of the national music of Scotland. Sometimes the tales took all day in the telling, sometimes several days, and throughout the centuries these national romances—which had their origin in pagan times—were amplified and added to until they grew into heroic sagas. They dealt with heathen deities, with dragons and mythical

[1] MacCulloch, article on the "Celtic Abode of the Blest" in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.

[2] Playgoers will be familiar with this idea from Sir James Barrie's *Mary Rose*.

animals, with good and evil spirits in various disguises, with elves and fairies, with kings and chieftains. They were passed down by oral tradition from one generation to another, and have in our own day been collected into great volumes by folklore societies. History and myth interwoven were the origin of these tales, and every clan had its own traditions. In Columba's time folklore was in its infancy, but the great Finn and Ossianic sagas date from the third century, though they afterwards grew to much more imposing dimensions.

As an example of ancient Celtic folklore I quote the *Questions put by Finn to the Maiden,* which give in a few words a wonderful characterization of the Celtic spirit. Finn is supposed to have been the father of Ossian, a great leader in the second century, who at the end of his life, after countless battles and adventures, passed to the *Land of the Ever-Young.*

" What is more numerous than the grass ? " said Finn.
" The dew-drops," said the maiden.
" What is whiter than snow ? " said Finn.
" The bloom of childhood," said the maiden.
' What is hotter than fire ? " said Finn.
" The hospitable man's face when a stranger cometh and there is nothing to offer him," said the maiden.
" What is swifter than the wind ? " said Finn.
" The mind of a woman," said the maiden.
" What is sharper than a sword ? " said Finn.
" A woman's wit, between two men," said the maiden.
" What is bitterer than poison ? " said Finn.
" The reproach of an enemy," said the maiden.
" What is blacker than the raven ? " said Finn.
" Death," said the maiden.
" What is best for a hero ? " said Finn.
" High deeds and humble pride," said the maiden.
" What is best for a woman ? " said Finn.
" Generous tenderness," said the maiden.
" What is softer than down ? " said Finn.
" The down of the cheek," said the maiden.
" What is the best of jewels ? " said Finn.
" A knife," said the maiden.

With this example of the tenderness, the wit, the honour, and the warlike temper of the Celt, we must leave a fascinating subject. We have tried to catch a glimpse of the Scottish Celts, their character, their beliefs, and their spirit, and we must now go forward with Columba. He found Scotland full of strange beliefs, some of them pagan, some of them merely human. But the people, accustomed to believe in the unseen, had open minds: they were naturally credulous, nothing was too strange for them to believe and so they were able to consider this great God of the Christians who embraced and overshadowed all other gods. As Columba himself believed in many of the superstitions of the age, a sympathetic attitude towards these ancient beliefs and observances, practically all derived from religious sources, will help our understanding of the Saint and his work, work which was as important from a national as from a religious point of view. "The conversion of the Picts may fairly be regarded as the governing fact in early Scottish history. Happening at the time it did, it determined those subsequent turns of affairs, which gradually led up to a consolidated Scotland and a united Scottish people. From the scanty materials which have come down to us, it is impossible to say to what extent the change of faith affected the structure of the Pictish nation. There is no reason to suppose, however, that any great breach was made with the past, either in social or political conditions. The new faith did its work by insinuating itself into the old order, by elevating the national consciousness, and by setting before it an ideal of well-being that was inconceivable under the old nature religion. But the acceptance of the new faith brought an immediate boon to the Pictish kingdom which was likewise of far-reaching consequences. Through a common religion it was brought into direct relations with Ireland, by whose higher civilization it was influenced for at least a century and a half. Shortly after their conversion also, the Picts seem to have

concluded a stable peace with the Dalriadic Scots, themselves nominally a Christian people. Under different conditions, with the Dalriadic Scots and the Bernician Angles as their united foes, the kingdom of the Picts might have collapsed before completing the work needed to make a national union possible." [1]

We can trace the hand of Columba shaping this peace between the Picts and Scots. Like a true diplomat he knew no understanding could be arrived at between a Christian and a pagan people, and so, after setting up his headquarters at Iona, he had gone forth to establish friendly relations with the king of the Picts, and thus lay the foundation for peace between his kinsmen of Dalriada and their Pictish neighbours. He built up his edifice step by step. He understood that only by unity of aims and ideals, by mutual goodwill and respect could a lasting peace be made. He put true ideas of morality before the people; he raised their whole conception of religion, and the keystone to his temple of peace was the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Columba's faith was a simple one, easily understood by those he brought to it, but none the less strong and unshakable. His life, he felt, was in the hands of God: no evil could reach him so long as God was on his side: God had decided his fate, and no human or supernatural power could alter the course marked out for him. At the end of one of his Irish poems, we come upon his simple Confession of Faith:

> I adore not the voice of birds,
> Nor sneezing, not lots in this world,
> Nor a boy, nor lots, nor woman:
>
> *My Druid is Christ, the Son of God,*
> *Christ, Son of Mary, the Great Abbat,*
> *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*

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[1] Hume Brown, *History of Scotland*, p. 17.

CHAPTER X

COLUMBA AS FATHER OF THE FAMILY OF IONA

After his journeyings over the north and west of Scotland, Columba came back to Iona as to a haven of rest where he could lay up fresh strength and energy for his next onslaught on the fastnesses of Druidism. The picture of his private life at Iona, as Adamnan sets it before us, is a delightful one. We see him in the position of father of a family, if family it can be called, in which there are no women and children. He dwells amid his monks, loved and obeyed by all, guiding their devotions, calling them to pray with him in the church, sometimes even in the middle of the night, engaged like them in that work of learning for which the world owes so much to monasteries—the production of splendid copies of the Scriptures.

He takes the greatest interest also in the various operations of the farm, for the monastery of Iona is a busy hive of workers who set an example to the whole country of the industry and perseverance which belong to the Christian life. Their land is highly cultivated; the Saint himself drives out in a cart to see their husbandry. They carry on various handicrafts and so propagate ideas of comfort and even of art; there are bakers among them and cooks, workers in wood who have logs towed to them across the sea from distant shores, smiths and workers in leather, wheelwrights and shipwrights, as well as fishermen and hunters. Such is the culture they practise in their island in order to extend it among the heathen. Along with the creed and the worship, they teach the arts and the friendly and peaceful co-operation in well-doing, which belongs

to Christianity, forerunners in this of the best Christian missions of modern times, such as the mission of Hans Egede to the Greenlanders or those of the Scottish Churches to the interior of Africa. "Amidst the pillage and licence of clan life, Iona appeared as an open court of equity and a strong fort of honour. Refugees from violence and fugitives from justice came from far and near and received their deserts through the spiritual discernment of the Abbot, who had curses for the guilty as well as consoling hospitality for the oppressed." [1]

Columba himself pervades all this manifold life, the king and the father of the whole settlement. His subordinates feel an unbounded veneration for him and yield him an implicit obedience. Of this he has the true secret, for he himself lives no easy or luxurious life, but besides his perils and journeyings and dangers untold, submits himself to the full discipline of the Order, eats sparingly, fasts often, rests on a stone flag, with a stone for his pillow, and is instantly at the call of every duty that arises. To his brother monks he is gentle and fatherly; not that he knows no other demeanour, for to transgressors who come to the island he is often very stern, and when he hears of crimes he is very ready to visit them with a heavy hand. He is indeed a born leader and ruler of men, and shows the qualities of leadership in small things as well as in great. To a commanding figure and a voice heard a mile off even when making no effort to speak loud, he added gifts of insight and discernment which gave rise to many a story of his supernatural powers. Within a century after his death, he grew into a complete magician who had constant intercourse with heavenly powers, could cure disease at a distance of a hundred miles, could furnish his friends with any wind they wanted for their voyages, could turn water into wine, could tell what was happening to an acquaintance in a distant land, and could assist those who invoked his aid from far away, without any conscious exertion.

[1] M'Ewen, *History of the Church of Scotland*, vol. i., p. 57.

But in his lifetime, before the legend grew to such dimensions, we can see that he was a man of commanding powers, devoted to great ends, one who could scarcely be regarded by men of ordinary calibre as one just like themselves.

That in broad outline is the impression one gathers from the various *Lives* of Columba. Let us try to put some detail into the picture.

The hospitality of Iona was one of its greatest features, and that not only to human beings, but to birds and beasts. We hear of a crane, "driven about by various winds from Hibernia," which came weary and fatigued and lay down exhausted on the beach at Machar. Columba, calling one of his monks, charged him to treat the bird tenderly. "Take it to some neighbouring hut," he said, "where it may be kindly received and carefully nursed and fed for three days and nights. . . . This bird do I consign to thee with such special care, because it cometh from our own native place." The monk obeyed, and after being carefully nursed for three days, the crane "gently rose on its wings to a great height . . . and directed its course across the sea to Hibernia." (I., xxxv.) Columba's great love of animals was characteristic of many Irish saints: his white pony was devoted to him and would rub its head against him when he fondled it. We see the same thing over and over again in the lives of the saints—and of men and women not officially regarded as such—that those who live in close fellowship with nature possess a strange power over animals—in such men the barrier between man and beast is swept away, they recognize in every living creature their fellow-being who shares with them the life given by their God.

Visitors arrived at Iona from every quarter, both great men and poor, noblemen and commoners, and occasional ecclesiastics or young men attracted by Columba's fame and eager to enlist in his following. These visitors were guided across Mull by huge standing stones, the line of which has been traced from Craignure

along the Pilgrim's Way to Fionphort, whence they ferried over to Iona. "The island became a focus for all the spiritual visions of the Gael. . . . On Columba irradiated a glow of mystic sanctity. . . . Chiefs and princes bowed before his unseen power."[1]

There is a legend that one day while Columba was writing in his hut, he was told that seven guests had arrived bringing him gifts from Gregory the Great at Rome. These gifts included the great Gem of Colum Cille, a cross and a Book of Hymns. As Gregory succeeded to the Papacy in 590, it is just possible that this mission may have come to Iona.

One of Adamnan's stories illustrates the procedure followed on the expectation and arrival of a guest. "On a day when the tempest was fierce," he writes, "and the sea exceedingly boisterous, the Saint . . . gave orders saying, 'Prepare the guest-chamber quickly and draw water to wash the stranger's feet.' One of the brethren on this inquired, 'Who can cross the sound safely, narrow though it be, on so perilous and stormy a day?' The Saint made answer, 'The Almighty has given a calm even in this tempest to a certain holy and excellent man who will arrive here among us before evening.' And lo! the same day the ship for which the brethren had sometime been looking out, arrived according to the Saint's prediction and brought St Cainnech. The Saint went down with the brethren to the landing-place and received him with all honour and hospitality. But the sailors . . . when they were asked what sort of a voyage they had had, told them, even as Columba had predicted, about both the tempest and the calm which God had given in the same sea." (I., iv.)

If the guest were not one of importance, he might not be taken into the presence of the Abbot for several days. We read how Columba came one day upon a man of humble birth, "sitting alone in the lodging provided for strangers." After being received by the Abbot, the guest was taken to the church to give thanks for

[1] Leslie, *Isle of Colum Cille*, p. 88.

his safe voyage. Then he was escorted to the guest-house where either Columba or one of the monks would wash his feet, the rendering of this ancient service being an important item in the courtesies paid the guests of Columba.

If the visitor should arrive on a fast day, an indulgence would be granted and the fast postponed: "We intend to fast to-morrow being Wednesday," Columba said one day, "and yet by the arrival of a certain troublesome guest, the usual fast will be broken." And so it happened, "for on the morning of that same Wednesday, another stranger was heard signalling across the sound. . . . He was a very religious man, and his arrival . . . broke the fast of that day." (I., xx.) Columba spoke petulantly of having to break the fast on account of this troublesome guest, and yet it never entered his mind to violate the laws of hospitality—rather must he and his monks suffer a disturbance of their habit. And this is the more marked that Adamnan carefully tells us the guest was "a very religious man." Hospitality came before even the fasts of the church, and this throws a peculiarly attractive light on the little community of Iona.

There is an old Gaelic belief that when Christ comes to holy men, he comes in the guise of a stranger, a beggar or a leper, and we find this expressed in the ancient *Rune of Hospitality*:

I saw a stranger yestreen:
I put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place:
And, in the sacred name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones.
And the lark said in her song,
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise;
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.[1]

[1] Recovered from the Gaelic by Rev. Kenneth MacLeod.

If that be true, then Columba never failed to minister to his Lord, for he was always kind to the poor. The story of his increasing the herd of a poor peasant called Columban (Friend-of-Columba) by his neighbours, is a good example of his methods. Columban lived on the promontory of Ardnamurchan over which Columba had to pass on every journey to and from the north. On this occasion Columba stayed the night with his humble friend, and as he was leaving next morning, he asked "as to the amount and kind of his goods." "I have only five small cows," he replied, "but if thou wilt bless them they will increase to more." Columba blessed the five lean kine saying, "Thou shalt have, by God's gift, a hundred and five cows, and an abundant blessing shall be also on thy children and grandchildren." (II., xxii.)

Another beneficent "miracle" wrought by Columba, has a Druidic flavour about it. Speaking to a poor man who had not wherewithal to support his wife and family, Columba said, "Take a branch . . . and bring it to me quickly." Columba sharpened the branch to a point, and giving it back to the man said, "'Preserve this stake with great care, for it will never hurt men nor cattle but only wild beasts and fishes, and as long as you preserve it you will never be without abundance of venison.' And when the poor man fixed the stake in a remote place . . . he found a stag of great size had fallen upon it." (II., xxxviii.)

Although Columba was kind to the poor, he did not look with favour on beggars, and he had no patience with those who were not generous with their plenty.

> Columba tells to us that
> To hell the generous shall never go,
> But those who steal and those who swear,
> They shall lose their right to God.[1]

He pronounced a severe sentence on a certain "rich and very stingy man," who despised the Saint and

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, II., 169.

showed him no hospitality. "The riches of that niggardly man who hath despised Christ in the strangers that came to be his guests, will gradually become less from this day and be reduced to nothing; he shall himself be a beggar; his son shall go about from house to house with a half-empty wallet, and he shall be slain by a rival beggar with an axe in the pit of a threshing-floor." Adamnan tells us with evident satisfaction that "all this was exactly fulfilled according to the prophecy of the holy man." (II., xxi.)

The monastery was the headquarters of medical help not only for Iona, but for a large district round about: people came long distances to be cured of their ailments. Medicine and surgery had been practised in Ireland from earliest times, there was even a class of professional physicians, the medicine-men of the Druids, whose office had become a hereditary one. The Irish were skilful in finding out and using the healing properties of various herbs, "moist and dry, hot and cold," as they classified them. Even the peasants were skilled as herb doctors, using house-leeks, sorrel, apple-juice, roots of marsh mallows and so on, in the concoction of their drugs. Healing stones were extensively resorted to, and the water in which these stones had been steeped was supposed to have healing powers. This custom was a survival of a Druidical rite, but the early Christians believed in it too, as did Columba himself. His medical powers operated largely through faith-healing or mental suggestion, and having so commanding and forceful a personality, we can understand his influence on the minds of those prone to believe in magic. When he visited Ireland at a later period we are told that by "invoking the name of Christ, this man of admirable life healed the disorders of various sick persons. . . . For either by his merely stretching out his holy hand or by the sprinkling of the sick with the water blessed by him, or by their touching even the hem of his cloak, or by their receiving his blessing on anything, as for instance on bread or salt,

and dipping it in water, those who believed recovered perfect health." Adamnan is careful to say that *those who believed* recovered perfect health. Columba's cures would not be ascribed to miraculous causes in our day when psycho-therapy works miracles as wonderful as his. But Columba believed also in the efficacy of prayer: there are many stories of how he prayed for those that were sick, and how his prayers were granted. When Diarmit, his faithful friend, was thought to be dying, Columba went to him, and standing beside his couch, "O my Lord," he implored, "be propitious unto me, I beseech thee, and take not away the soul of my faithful attendant from its dwelling in the flesh while I live!" (II., xxxi.)

The sign of the Cross, or saving sign as it was called, was extensively used by Columba, to keep away evil. Before the cows were milked the sign would be made over the milk-pail, and it was when a young monk forgot this ceremony that the demon got into the pail. Columba was sitting in his cell writing when the young man came up to him, carrying on his back a wooden vessel full of new milk. He asked Columba to bless his burden as he usually did. "The Saint . . . raised his hand and formed the saving sign in the air, which at once was greatly agitated: the bar which fastened the lid of the pail . . . was shot away to a great distance, while the lid fell to the earth and the greater part of the milk was spilled upon the ground. The young monk laid down his vessel with the little milk that remained, and kneeled down in prayer. 'Rise up, Columban,' said Columba, 'for thou hast acted negligently in thy work to-day, inasmuch as thou didst not banish the demon that lurked in the empty vessel by forming on it the sign of the Cross of our Lord before the milk was poured into it: and now as thou see-est being unable to bear the power of that sign, he has quickly fled in terror, troubled the whole vessel in every corner, and spilled the milk. . . . Bring the vessel then nearer to me here, that I

may bless it!' This being done, the half-empty pail was found the same instant filled by divine agency." (II., xv.)

The tools also were blessed by the sign of the Cross, that the work might prosper: the pen was crossed that the writing might be to the glory of God: the seed was crossed that the crop might escape the spells of the evil one. The supernatural nature of this sacred sign appealed to the Highlanders, and was possibly the origin of the custom of erecting crosses, to wage endless warfare against the powers of evil and to commemorate at certain spots the victory of Christ over the devil. The sign of the Cross was also used at sea: we read how the sailors were directed to raise the sail-yards in the form of a cross and spread the sails upon them and "thus putting to sea . . . were enabled to reach their island that same day."

The tradition that Columba refused to allow cows on the island because "where there are cows there are women, and where there are women there is sin," and that he banished women from the island—that tradition has no foundation. The monastery had its herd of cows as we know, and although, owing to the law of the Irish Church, celibacy was the rule of the community, we have no reason to think that Columba interfered with the family life of the people, rather did he take a kind and lively interest in it. In his own country he was accustomed to the view that women were to be regarded with respect, for in them lay the hope of the continuity of the race. In Ireland, in the sixth century, women of the class to which Columba belonged were on an equality with men: they were well educated. We read of a king's daughter being sent to Clonard to learn her Psalms in Latin under St Finnian. But the lower classes had still much to hope for: female slaves were treated as so much property and still bore their part in battle. Columba succeeded at the Synod of Drumceatt in getting them exempted from bearing arms, but this reform was allowed to lapse, and it was not

till the time of Adamnan, and by his exertions, that a law was finally passed debarring women from fighting.

We have several testimonies as to how Columba helped women and how they believed in him and reverenced him. There is the story of how he sent one of his monks all the way to Ireland to mend the broken thigh-bone of a maiden who had fallen on her way back from church and broken her leg. This cure was effected by pouring water, in which a gift from the Saint had lain, over the broken thigh. (II., v.)

There is another story of how, when staying on an island off the Irish coast, Columba settled a dispute between a wife and her husband. The wife came to Columba and told him how she hated her husband, who was deformed, and wished to leave him and go away to live in a convent. She no doubt expected the Saint to be pleased with her proposal, but instead he told her what she suggested was impossible—" for thou art bound by the laws of the husband as long as he liveth, for it would be impious to separate those whom God hath lawfully joined together. This day let us three join in prayer to the Lord and in fasting." The husband and wife agreed to fast with the Saint, who spent that day and the following night in prayer for them. Next day he asked the woman in presence of her husband, " O woman! art thou still ready to-day to go away to a convent of women?" " I know now, O Columba," she answered, " that thy prayer to God for me hath been heard: for that man whom I hated yesterday, I love to-day. My heart hath been changed last night in some unknown way, from hatred to love." (II., xlii.) The wise counsel of the Saint had cooled the wife's anger and led her to see that she loved her husband and that her irritation was but a passing thing. Women must have felt Columba's sympathy with them, his wisdom and his power, a power not to be regarded as miraculous, rather as a sense of strength which comes to all wise and simple men who believe that God is in his Heaven and

that therefore no lasting hurt can come to his children on earth. Columba's love for children is illustrated by a simple quatrain, a *Greeting to a Child*, quoted by O'Donnell:

> O conscience clear,
> O soul unsullied,
> Here is a kiss for thee—
> Give thou a kiss to me!

Women prayed to Columba from afar: a certain little woman in Ireland called on his name while she was suffering the pains of child-birth, and Columba, who was reading in his hut, arose and hastened to the church, where on his bended knees he prayed for her to Christ, "who was by birth Himself a partaker of humanity." (II., xli.) It is difficult to understand how Columba received these entreaties for help addressed to him from far distances. But is it impossible to think that he possessed a higher degree of knowledge than his fellows? We know the curious gift of the second sight which no psychic investigation has yet been able to explain but which cannot be denied. Is it not possible that Columba, a pure born Celt, had this power in greater degree than his fellow-countrymen?

Though Columba could be stern and unforgiving to those who had been guilty of any dreadful sin, and would not allow such men to tread the soil of his island, he held out hope of forgiveness to them "if they repented and did penance with tears and lamentations." He knew little of that grim doctrine of Hell which afterwards became such a feature of Scottish theology: according to him penance and repentance and an earnest striving after good could wipe away the stain and allow the sinner to pass through the gates of Heaven. "Though a man do much ill through anger," he said; "yet will God pardon him therefor, if he do penance. For God and the folk of Heaven have more joy for a sinner that returneth to them with repentance, than for one that doeth no sin and remaineth continually in a state of virtue. For it is the wont of us mortals to

have more welcome for those that are dear to us and that have long been absent, than for those that are ever with us. Wit thou well, that in the world is none that shall sooner reach Heaven, than the sinner that repenteth." [1] But when the sinner showed no repentance, then Columba's anger was stirred up, and he was indeed a terrible figure. His wrath was most of all aroused when he heard of the oppression of the poor. Once while staying near Ardnamurchan with Columban, his poor friend, of whom he had become very fond, he found robbers (wicked cousins of the king of Dalriada) carrying off Columban's cattle and sheep, even the very furniture of his house. They had already made two journeys to their boat, laden with booty, and were returning for the third time to their vessel, when they met Columba. Now though they despised him, they had thought he was far on his journey by this time, or they might not have ventured on such wholesale robbery. Columba reproached Ioan, the eldest brother, for his evil deeds and entreated him to give back what he had stolen. But the robbers scorned the Saint; mocking and laughing at him they jumped into their boat, loaded down to the gunwale with Columban's property, and shoved off. Columba rushed after them "up to his knees in the clear green sea-water." But the boat was already out of reach. Raising up his hands, he invoked the aid of Christ to punish the offenders. Then he came out of the sea and went up on a little knoll to let the sun dry his garments. His companions heard him pronounce sentence on the robber from this height: "This miserable wretch who hath despised Christ in his servants will never return to the port from which you have now seen him set sail: neither shall he nor his wicked associates reach the land for which they are bound, for a sudden death shall prevent it. This day a furious storm shall proceed from a cloud which you will see rising in the north, shall overwhelm him and his companions so that

[1] O'Donnell, § 182.

not one of them shall survive to tell the tale." (II., xxiii.)

It was a beautiful calm day and Columba's companions could hardly believe that a storm should rise out of that settled sky. But soon a cloud rose from the sea and caused a great hurricane, which overtook the robbers and their booty between Mull and Colonsay. The heavily-laden boat could not rise to the waves, it was overwhelmed in a sea suddenly lashed into fury, and not even one of those in the vessel escaped.

We need not consider more of the stories which tell of Columba's wrath. Montalembert, writing on this aspect of his nature, says: "His charity might sometimes seem to have degenerated into feebleness, so great was the pleasure he took in all the details of benevolence and Christian brotherhood. But let there appear an injustice to repair, an unfortunate individual to defend, an oppressor to punish, an outrage against humanity to avenge, and Columba immediately awoke and displayed all the energy of his youth. The former man reappeared in a moment: his passionate temperament recovered the mastery—his distinctive character, vehement in expression and resolute in action, burst forth at every turn: and his natural boldness led him in the face of all dangers to lavish remonstrances, invectives and threats, which the justice of God, too rarely visible in such cases, sometimes deigned to fulfil."

Columba seems often to have felt the need—felt by every thoughtful mind as well as by the saints and by Christ Himself—of going away to a desert place to be alone. Sometimes in the night he would rise and go into the church to pray: sometimes he took his faithful Diarmit with him, but often he went alone. When in Skye, "he left the brethren and went alone into a dense forest to pray." And in Iona "he went to seek a place remote from men and fitting for prayer." This may have been the Hermits' Cell, the foundations of which are still to be seen in a lonely glen leading down to the western shore. It is best reached by

following the Ridge of the Causeway across the Lochan Mor and then keeping south-west, till round the cliffs of a rugged rock one comes suddenly upon the beautiful *Secluded Hollow* with the ruins of the little cell in the midst of it, its opening, as usual, towards the south. The peace of that glen is never disturbed, and there, one feels sure, Columba used to go to be alone.

It is a happy picture this, of Columba at Iona, a picture on which the mind loves to dwell. The island itself with its atmosphere of holiness comforted the Saint and filled his soul with peace. His romantic temperament responded to the beauty spread around him. We think of him looking out over the wideness of the sea, finding in it rest and refreshment in all his difficulties—for a church and a nation are not founded and built up without much labour and disillusionment, much weariness of spirit and of flesh.

But in spite of his happiness in Iona, in his Church, and in his devoted monks, Columba never forgot Ireland. O'Donnell naturally dwells on this and gives us two staves attributed to Columba, the first being a spirited, if not a flattering picture of the men of Caledonia and their garb:

> Many here the lanky chiels,
> Many diseases here and distempers,
> Many those with scanty clouts,
> Many the hard and jealous hearts—
> I would liefer die in Erin than have life forever in Alba.

The second stave shows Columba's devotion to Ireland:

> To the Gaels myself,
> To the Gaels my honour,
> To the Gaels my learning,
> To the men of Erin my glory.

The severest punishment Columba could inflict on any remorseful Irishman who came to Iona for guidance, was that he should never again visit the shores of Erin. For Columba knew the bitterness of exile, and it is

touching to see, from one of his Irish poems, with what passion this exile in a far country longed for his native land.

COLUMCILLE FECIT

Delightful would it be to me to be in Uchd Ailiun [1]
On the pinnacle of a rock,
That I might often see
The face of the ocean ;
That I might see its heaving waves
Over the wide ocean,
When they chant music to their Father
Upon the world's course ;
That I might see its level sparkling strand,
It would be no cause of sorrow ;
That I might hear the thunder of the crowding waves
Upon the rocks ;
That I might hear the roar by the side of the church
Of the surrounding sea ;
That I might see its noble flocks
Over the watery ocean ;
That I might see the sea-monsters,
The greatest of all wonders ;
That I might see its ebb and flood
In their career ;
That my mystical name might be, I say,
Cul ri Erin ;
That contrition might come upon my heart
Upon looking at her ;
That I might bewail my evils all,
Though it were difficult to compute them ;
That I might bless the Lord
Who conserves all,
Heaven with its countless bright orders,
Land, strand and flood ;
That I might search the books all,
That would be good for my soul ;
At times kneeling to beloved Heaven ;
At times psalm singing ;
At times contemplating the King of Heaven,
Holy the chief ;

[1] An Irish headland.

At times at work without compulsion,
This would be delightful.
At times plucking duilisc from the rocks ;
At times fishing ;
At times giving food to the poor ;
At times in a carcair : [1]
The best advice in the presence of God
To me has been vouchsafed.
The King whose servant I am will not let
Anything deceive me.

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[1] Solitary Cell. The MS. of this poem is—or was before the war—in the Burgundian Library at Brussels. The above translation was made by the late Professor O'Curry and is quoted from Reeves' *Adamnan*.

CHAPTER XI

THE CORONATION OF AIDAN AND THE SYNOD OF DRUMCEATT: COLUMBA IN IRELAND

CONNALL, king of Scottish Dalriada, died nine years after Columba came to Iona. His death, though it robbed Columba of a good friend, was to open up the way for the achievement of one of his highest hopes—the establishment of Scottish Dalriada as a separate kingdom with an independent monarch for king.

Eogan, son of Gabhran, was the direct heir to the throne. But shortly after Connall's death, when Columba was staying on Hinba, one of the Garvelloch Islands, thinking no doubt of the affairs of Dalriada, he dreamt that an angel of the Lord appeared to him, sent to urge him to crown Aidan king instead of his brother Eogan. This dream came to Columba every night for three nights, and at last, in obedience to its commands, the Saint sailed back to Iona where in due time he crowned Aidan king.[1] The coronation took place in 574, and it shows how Columba had assumed the leadership of the Scots that when he preferred Aidan, Aidan was therefore adopted and sent to Iona to be consecrated. A dream such as Columba had on Eilean-na-

[1] There is a tradition that Aidan was crowned on the Druidic Black Stone of Iona and that this stone was the same Stone of Destiny on which the kings of Great Britain are still crowned. From Iona, this historic stone was taken to Dunstaffnage Castle, thence it was removed to Scone, the ancient capital of Scotland, where for many years the Scottish kings were crowned on it. Edward I. carried it off to London, and there it awaited the time when a Stewart king should rule over the united kingdoms of England and Scotland and an ancestor of Aidan's be again crowned on the Stone of Fate.

Naoimh would of course be regarded as a solemn warning by the people of that time: they would not dare to disobey it, nor the holy man to whom that direct sign had been vouchsafed. From Aidan, the line of succession runs directly through the early Celtic kings to James VI. of Scotland, in whose reign the kingdoms of England and Scotland were united. So that both the Church and the State of Scotland recognize their founder in Columba. His missions prepared the way for peace between the clans of Caledonia, and so made it possible in later years for the Picts and Scots to form with the Britons and Saxons a united nation. Columba realized that Dalriada could never be a self-respecting or prosperous kingdom till it was independent. Hitherto it had paid a yearly tax to Ireland, "an eric of kindly blood, seven shields, seven steeds, seven hounds, and seven bondsmen," but now Columba determined that Aidan should be regarded as an independent monarch both by Ireland, the mother-country, and by King Brude. To that end he decided to take Aidan over to the approaching Synod of Drumceatt, a National Assembly at which all the kings and rulers and clergy of Ireland were to be present.

They set out hopefully from Iona with an imposing retinue, but when they came to the whirlpool of Corryvreckan, a great storm drove their vessel into the whirlpool: the waves washed over the boat till it was heavily water-logged, and Columba laboured with his companions as they baled fearfully to try and keep it above water. But his monks stopped him. "What thou art doing now is of little use to us in our present danger," they said. "Thou shouldst rather pray for us as we are perishing." Columba then "ceased to throw out the bitter waters of the green wave and began to pour out a fervent and sweet prayer to the Lord. Wonderful to relate! The very moment the Saint stood up in the prow with his hands outstretched to Heaven and prayed to the Almighty, the whole storm of wind and the fury of the sea ceased more quickly than can be told and a

perfect calm instantly ensued. But those who were in the vessel were amazed, and giving thanks with great admiration, glorified the Lord in the holy and illustrious man." (II., xi.)

When the travellers landed in Ireland they were joined by many of Columba's friends and disciples. Columba was a diplomat; he wanted to usher his new king in among his compeers in an impressive manner. And then, of course, this was Columba's first appearance in Ireland since he had left it under a cloud. We read of his company,

> Forty priests was their number
> Twenty bishops, noble, worthy,
> For singing Psalms, a practice without blame,
> Fifty deacons, thirty students.

Even if we allow the author of this stave a margin for poetic licence, it shows that the poet was impressed by Columba's following, and suggests that the Saint must have become a considerable power to command so considerable a retinue. He was returning to his native land, not as an exile, but as a dignitary of the Church, bringing in under his protection the new king of the Scots of Albyn. The fact of his returning to Ireland with such pomp and ceremony discounts the legend which sentenced him to perpetual exile, and Adamnan assures us further that Columba visited Ireland ten times from Iona. But the Old Irish *Life* in the Book of Lismore clings to the sentence of the legend in its account of this first visit—". . . Colum Cille came from the east with a cerecloth over his eyes and his dalmatic over it above, and the cape of the cowl over it above, so that he might not see the men of Ireland nor her women." O'Donnell mentions also "a sod of the earth of Alba under his feet," that he might not tread the soil of Erin. "For he had prophesied it before he went first to Scotland, and he uttered the stave:

> There is a grey eye
> That looks back upon Ireland.

It will never see afterwards
Ireland's men nor her women.

Wherefore to certify that the poet said:

Though fair Colum came
From the east in a boat over the sea,
He saw nothing in noble Ireland
After coming into the great Convention."

Though it is possible that Columba made his entrance into the Convention thus humbly veiled, he certainly went about the country afterwards with his eyes uncovered. The clerics of Ireland would acknowledge by this time that Columba had justified himself and expiated his sin. For he had accomplished great things in these nine years: he had established friendly relations with the Scottish Picts and begun his mission amongst them: he had firmly established the monastery of Iona as a stronghold of the faith, a centre whence the teaching of Christianity shone forth to north, south, and east. Now, with the acknowledgement of Aidan as independent king of the Scots, the objects for which he had left Ireland, would be all well on the way to fulfilment. He had returned to Ireland powerful and successful, not a man to be lightly treated, but one to whom every sign of deference and respect must be shown. In one of the accounts of his reception we read that when he entered the Assembly, all the members rose up. Ædh, king of Ireland, was of the same race as Columba: it was he who had given the site for the monastery of Derry so that Columba was nominally at least among friends, though some of the old writers think Ædh was jealous of him and annoyed that he should have come again to Ireland. O'Donnell gives us another example of the prevalence of the *deasil* ceremony:

Righthand-wise went they—
Colum, Aidan, the poets,
To the meeting where Ædh was,
In Drum Ceatt of fair heroes.

Columba had not come to the Synod solely on Aidan's account: he wished also to secure the liberation of Scannlan, a captive prince, and to say a good word for the poets of Ireland who had incurred the displeasure of their compatriots. Scannlan was a hostage in the hands of Ædh, and Columba was surety for him that he would be released at the end of a year—" and he was not released. . . . And a hut of wattle was built round him without any path out of it save a way by which a little salt food and a scanty supply of ale were given him. And fifty warriors were guarding him outside the hut, and nine chains were on him in the hut, and to every one he saw passing he used to say this: 'A drink!' saith he. And that thing was reported to Colum Cille in Iona, and he wept greatly at what he heard and this is what brought him quickly from the east." [1] According to this chronicle, Ædh decreed that no one should rise when Columba came into the Convention. But Domnal, Ædh's son, " at once rose before him and made him welcome and kissed him on his cheek and put him in his own place." Then Ædh relented. He arose and made them welcome and Columba said, " Let this be the welcome, to do our will!" But Ædh refused to release Scannlan whom Columba liberated by " miraculous " methods. The whole story is involved and difficult, but the following quotation is irresistible. When Scannlan escaped and came to Columba:

" Hast thou news? " saith Colum Cille.

" A drink! " saith Scannlan.

" Hast thou brought a blessing? " saith Colum Cille.

" A drink! " saith Scannlan.

" Tell me how thou camest? " saith Colum Cille

" A drink! " saith Scannlan.

" Slowness of answer be on thy successors continually! " [1] saith Colum Cille at last, exasperated. But Scannlan was given his drink, " a vat of ale for three,

[1] Dr Whitley Stokes, *Lives of the Saints*, from the Book of Lismore.

and he lifted up the vat between his two hands and drank it with one draught, and then consumed his dinner, even seven joints of old bacon and ten loaves of wheat. Thereafter he went and was three days and nights in one sleep."

The story of this gargantuan feast shows incidentally that Columba had carried his point and that Scannlan was released. It was on account of this perhaps that Ædh was displeased with the Saint, but he was conciliated when, at parting, Columba gave him his cowl, promising that it would protect him from danger in battle. This it did for many years till one day Ædh forgot to put it on, and was killed.

The question as to whether the poets should be banished from Ireland requires a little explanation. The poets of Ireland at that time were the descendants of the Druids, though most of them had abandoned Druidism and outwardly at least professed Christianity. They were expected to be omnipotent as regards learning, to answer any questions which might be put to them on laws, on rights, on history, antiquities, or genealogies. Though the requirements were large, and the poet spent many years in preparation, "once admitted to the coveted rank, the guerdon was splendid, for he was highly honoured, had many privileges, and received princely rewards and presents. . . . All people high and low had a sincere admiration and respect for these poets, and so far as their means permitted willingly entertained them and gave them presents. . . . But as might be expected, they often abused their position and privileges by unreasonable demands, so that many of them while admired for their learning came to be feared and hated for their arrogance. Their rapacity gave rise to a well-known legend . . . that they had a *cauldron of greed* . . . made of gold or silver . . . which they carried about suspended by little chains or *findruine* from the tops of their spears. Into this every person who gave them anything put the donation. . . . Their oppression became so intolerable that on three

several occasions . . . the people of Ireland rose up against them and insisted on their suppression. But they were saved each time by the intervention of the men of Ulster. The last occasion of these was at the Convention of Drumceatt in the year 574. . . ."[1]

It was Columba who came to their aid: he thought the poets were being hardly used, and being a poet himself his sympathy was with them, though he acknowledged they had abused their privileges. According to O'Donnell one of Columba's arguments in favour of the poets and their dues, was that "God himself did buy thrice fifty psalms of praise from David." He argued also that it would be a pity to pull up all that grew in the field, for then the good corn would be pulled up with the tares; also that the wholesale expulsion of the poets would deprive Ireland of a wealth of folklore and antiquity which nothing could ever replace. He urged that, instead of being absolutely suppressed, their number should be reduced, and strict rules formulated by which they should be kept in subjection for the future. They were also to be obliged—those of them who were capable of it—to work for their living, that the community should no longer be taxed by supporting them in idleness. Those who were learned were to teach the young, and were allocated a certain amount of land by which they could maintain themselves without help from the people. In short, the poets were made to work and were given the means of self-support. They were naturally grateful to Columba for his intercession, and Dallan Forgaill, the chief bard of Ireland, wrote a eulogy of the Saint, the *Amhra Choluimcille*, which tells how twelve hundred poets came into the Convention and sang a stave with music in praise of Columba. Columba was deeply moved and, according to the legend, forgot himself so far as to feel a glow of pride. Baithene touched him on the arm, and looking up he saw a host of demons in the sky, laughing contemptuously at his self-satisfaction. Flinging his cowl over

[1] Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland*, I., 456.

his head, Columba abased himself and the demons disappeared. Columba then impressed on Dallan that the *Amhra* was not to be repeated till after his death, when virtue should come to him who recited it.

> Columb's Amhra, every day,
> Whoever will recite it completely
> Will reach the good bright Kingdom
> Which God granted to Dallan.[1]

The question of the Convention which chiefly concerned Columba, was how far the king of Scottish Dalriada was to be independent. The Scots of Argyll having come originally from Irish Dalriada, owed Ireland the fealty of a young state to its mother-country. As such it would still be under the obligation of paying dues, as the smaller Irish kingdoms did, to the central power. It was eventually decided that the kingdom of the Scots was to be freed from all payment of tributes, but that in the event of the mother-country being engaged in war by land, the Scots were to make her cause their own and hasten to her aid.

Aidan was thus free to rule over his kingdom as an independent state. Columba had secured Home Rule for this Irish colony, and soon after his return to Scotland, where he was now honoured and respected by King Brude, he secured that Brude also should regard Aidan and his people as an independent people, not in subjection to any temporal power. It is not to be supposed that the Dalriadic kingdom enlarged its boundaries and extended its territory without some protest on the part of the Picts, but it was a great step that Brude recognized the new kingdom and allowed its right to exist. That little Scots colony which had landed in Argyll in

[1] O'Donnell tells us that Columba offered Dallan all manner of rewards for his praise, but Dallan would take nothing. Then Columba said, "I will give Heaven to everyone that doth memorize the praise." "That reward will I take," said Dallan. "It is a strange reward," said Baithene. "Strange (Amhra) shall be the name of the praise, said Columcille. And thus Amhra is the name of that praise from that time." O'Donnell, § 336.

the beginning of the fifth century, was the nucleus of the kingdom of Scotland, a monument to the genius of Columba.

After the Synod of Drumceatt Columba seems to have made a tour round all his Irish monasteries, visiting also those which his disciples had founded since he went to Iona. We hear of constant journeys and those not only in the north, which was his native country. It is not within the scope of this book to give particulars of all his foundations in Ireland: that has already been done by Dr Reeves, who gives a list of thirty-seven churches and monasteries founded by Columba or his monks, and does not claim that his list is complete. (See Appendix II.)

Columba generally made his journeys on foot, but sometimes when he had a long distance to go, he would drive in a little cart or "chariot" as the old writers called it. On one such occasion he used a little "yoked" cart which he had previously blessed: but from some unaccountable neglect, "the linch-pins were not inserted in the holes in the extremities of the axles. . . . The distance they rode that day was very long and the jolting severe, yet the wheels did not come off the axles nor even stir from their proper places . . . although there were no linch-pins to secure them. But divine grace alone so favoured the venerable man, that the car in which he was safely seated proceeded without being upset or meeting any obstacle to retard its progress." (II., xliv.)

Irish cars, it would seem, had already in Columba's time begun to earn their reputation as a hazardous means of locomotion. Adamnan leads us to infer that the sanctity of the passenger alone saved him from mishap.

There is a story of the usefulness of Columba's powers in connection with his visit to the church of Tirdaglass, the *Field of the Two Streams*. Columba had been asked to go and visit the brethren of that monastery,

but when he got there he saw the monks running about and talking together in the greatest agitation: the keys of the church had been mislaid and could not be found! Columba at once took pity on the distress of his hosts. Going up to the door of the church, "The Lord is able," said he, "to open his own house for his servants without a key." "At these words the bolts of the lock were driven back with great force and the door opened of itself." (II., xxxvii.)

It was in the autumn that Columba arrived at his beloved Derry, and there is a delightful story about his beneficent influence on an apple-tree which he came upon one day, its branches bowed down by the weight of fruit upon them. But the apples "injured rather than pleased those who tasted them because of their exceeding bitterness." Columba raised his hand and blessed the tree, "In the name of Almighty God," he said, "O bitter tree, let all thy bitterness depart from thee and let all the apples, hitherto so very bitter, be now changed into the sweetest!" Adamnan adds his little commentary, "Wonderful to relate, quicker than the word . . . all the apples of the tree lost their bitterness and were changed to an amazing sweetness according to the Saint's word." This legend has been regarded as showing how Columba established the grafting and culture of fruit trees. (II., ii.)

Columba was famous in Ireland as a soldier as well as a saint. Fighting was the great occupation in the Erin of those days: there was no use for a man who was not a good fighter, while for the skilful and successful warrior, no honour could be too great. Three battles were fought under Columba's protection in Ireland. He was not present, but the battles were fought by his clan, and it was thought to be owing to his prayers that victory came to his kinsmen. These three battles were those of Culdreimhne (561), Coleraine (579), and Cuilfedha (587), and it was said to be in reparation for his part in them that Columba wrote his famous Latin poem, the *Altus Prosator* (p. 171). There was, of course, excuse

for Columba's interesting himself in these battles. In his day the country was ruled by the clan system and the monasteries were necessarily under the protection of the chief in whose territory the community had settled. The ground on which the monastery stood had been granted by the chief, and till long after Columba's time the monks were liable to be called upon to fight the battles of their temporal overlords. Columba, as the founder of numerous monasteries and the friend of princes, was dragged into many feuds, for he was a true patriot, passionately devoted to his own race, whose quarrels were his too. And it was not till many centuries after his death that a strong right arm ceased to be regarded as a theological argument.

After many weeks in Ireland, Columba was about to return to Iona when Bishop Conall of Coleraine conceived a wish to show him how deeply the Irish people admired and reverenced him. To this end the bishop collected countless presents to give a hospitable reception to the blessed man. Many of these presents were laid out in the paved court of the monastery that the Saint might bless them on his arrival. As he was giving this blessing, Columba was inspired by Divine Grace "to discriminate between different tribute gifts: 'The mercy of God,' said he, 'attendeth the man who gave this, for his charity to the poor and his munificence.' Then he pointed to another of the many gifts, 'Of this wise and avaricious man's offering,' said he, 'I cannot partake until he repent sincerely of the sin of avarice.'" This saying ran through the crowd and came to the ears of the man in question, Colum, son of Aid. "His conscience reproached him, he ran immediately to the Saint, and on bended knees repented of his sin, promising to forsake his former greedy habits and to be liberal ever after. . . . The Saint bade him rise, and from that moment he was cured of the fault of greediness, for he was truly a wise man . . ." (I., xxxv.) This story does not show us the stern, unforgiving Saint which some of Columba's

biographers would have us believe him: he was always ready to forgive when he saw real repentance.

Columba was on the whole a greater figure in Ireland than he ever was in Scotland. Ireland was the Land of Saints where the monastic tradition had many years behind it, and the saints had correspondingly greater honour shown them than in Scotland, where Columba planted his monastery on virgin soil. In Ireland, too, he was of the race of kings, and in his latter years—especially after the Synod of Drumceatt, which added greatly to his reputation because he carried his points against those of the Irish chiefs—he was regarded with extreme veneration, in truth as the Angel of the Lord.

We get some idea of the homage paid him in his native country from Adamnan's account of how the monks and the people greeted him on his last visit to Clonmacnois. "As soon as the rumour spread that Columba was near . . . all flocked from their little grange farms near the monastery and, along with those who were in it, ranged themselves with enthusiasm under the Abbot Alither: then advancing beyond the enclosure of the monastery, they went out as one man to meet Columba as if he were an angel of the Lord. . . . Humbly bowing down, with their faces to the ground in his presence, they kissed him most reverently, and singing hymns of praise as they went, they conducted him with all honour to the church. Over the Saint as he walked, a canopy of wood was supported by four men walking by his side, lest the Holy Abbot Columba should be troubled by the crowd of brethren pressing upon him." (I., iii.)

And we have an interesting testimony as to how his own monks regarded Columba. One of them, Fintan by name, was attending an ecclesiastical meeting in Ireland when some question was asked about Columba. Fintan got up and delivered this estimate of his master's personality:

"Columba is not to be compared with philosophers and learned men, but with patriarchs, prophets, and apostles.

The Holy Ghost reigns in him: he has been chosen by God for the good of all.

"He is a sage among sages, a king among kings, an anchorite among anchorites, a monk among monks: and in order to bring himself to the level even of laymen, he knows how to be poor of heart among the poor: thanks to the apostolic charity which inspires him, he can rejoice with the joyful and weep with the unfortunate. And amid all the gifts which God's generosity has lavished on him, the true humility of Christ is so royally rooted in his soul, that it seems to have been born with him." [1]

According to a story in O'Donnell's *Life* it looks as if Columba had foreseen the later distresses of his beloved Erin. "There were three pets that Columcille had," writes O'Donnell, "a cat and a wren and a fly. And he understood the speech of each of these creatures. . . . And it happened that the wren ate the fly and the cat ate the wren. And Columcille spake by the spirit of prophecy, and he said it was thus men should do in a later time: the strong of them should eat the weak, that is to say, should take his wealth and gear from him and should show him neither right nor justice. And Columcille said that while the Gael of Erin was thus, the power of foreigners should be over them, and whenever right and justice were kept by them, they should themselves have power again. . . . 'When the Gaels do justice and right among themselves,' said Columcille, 'I make great joy. . . .'" [2]

[1] *Acta Sanctorum*, June 9.

[2] O'Donnell, § 118, 127. It must of course be borne in mind that the prophecies of Columba, as quoted by O'Donnell, are not of assured authenticity.

CHAPTER XII

COLUMBA AMONG THE WESTERN ISLES

Ocean Blessing

. . . . . .

Sain us and shield us and sanctify us,
Be thou, King of the elements, seated at our helm
And lead us in peace to the end of our journey.

With winds mild, kindly, benign, pleasant,
Without swirl, without whirl, without eddy,
That would do no harmful deed to us.

We ask all things of Thee, O God,
According to Thine own will and word.

Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I., 333.

To anyone who has sailed the Hebridean seas in a small boat, the fascination of Columba's method of travelling lends additional romance to his life. To sail from Iona, as Columba must often have done, out to Staffa, or Gometra, or Tiree, or even to his Isle of Saints: to conquer winds and tides, to harness the elements to carry him "against the wind," to sail close-hauled into a stiff breeze, or to race over the waters before a following wind—all these would be as the salt of life to the hardy Gael. No one who has not sailed a boat and felt it pull and quiver at the helm, can quite appreciate the romance of Columba's life as Apostle of the Western Isles.

The old Hebridean manner of blessing the ship is probably an heirloom from the days when Columba and his monks sailed these seas. After the ship had put to sea and the "sailyards" had been raised in the

form of a cross and the sails spread upon them, the following Litany was chanted by Steersman and crew:

Steersman. Let us bless our ship!
Crew. God the Father bless her.
Steersman. Let us bless our ship!
Crew. Jesus Christ bless her.
Steersman. Let us bless our ship!
Crew. The Holy Ghost bless her. Etc.

Though that Litany was heard by Martin when he visited the Hebrides about 1695, it seems now unfortunately to have died out.

When Columba sailed away with his monks to visit some distant island, he did not sit idle in the boat as the Abbot might conceivably have done, On still days when no breath of wind rippled the water and the boat lay becalmed, the monks toiling at rowing, Columba took his turn at the oars, and on stormy days he helped with the working of the boat as manfully as the rest of the crew. Though the monks were themselves daring mariners, they also had "sailors," men of the island probably, who knew the rocks and currents of that dangerous coast. Columba himself was a skilful sailor as we see from the legends of how he foretold favourable winds for the voyages of his friends. Though this seems miraculous to the landsman, to the sailor it speaks only of a life lived beside the sea, when sky and wind and weather are the objects of daily and hourly study, and when he who has studied them can forecast the weather with a precision little short of miraculous.

There are innumerable stories of escape from death by wind and wave as well as by the vortices of the whirlpool which threatened the monks on their frequent voyages between Ireland and Scotland. Columba saw symbolized in this whirlpool the torments of Purgatory suffered by Brecan, grandson of Niall of the Nine Hostages, a cousin of his own who had perished there and given the place its name. And so while he prayed

that his monks might escape the dangers of Corry-vreckan, he prayed also that the soul of his cousin might be released from its whirling torments.

One day while Columba was praying in the church at Iona, he cried out with a smile, "Columbanus has just now set out on a voyage to us and is in great danger in the rolling tides of Brecan's whirlpool: he is sitting at the prow and raising both his hands to Heaven: he is also blessing that angry and dreadful sea: yet in this the Lord only frightens him, for the ship in which he is shall not be wrecked in the storm: but this is rather to excite him to pray more fervently, that by God's favour he may escape the danger of his voyage and reach us in safety." (I., v.) This story throws a curious light on Columba's conception of God, that He deliberately frightened a man—even a holy bishop—in order to make him turn the more eagerly to God and throw himself on the divine mercy. Columba's mind had evidently not yet shaken itself free from the ancient beliefs about pagan gods, who were supposed to take a malicious delight in tormenting their followers.

Columba's monks followed a practice common among their Irish brethren, of setting out to find a *disert* in the ocean, some barren rock where nothing could disturb their meditations. That was not perhaps a brave way of facing life, but it was a feature of the early religious customs of every country and it found a place also in the life of the family of Iona. The monks sailed the seas incessantly in search of this *disert*, whence they never meant to return. And in these early days before scientists or explorers had plumbed the depths of the ocean or charted its unknown seas, the monks who set sail from Iona, laying their course out over the boundless sea where, so far as they knew, no land existed, must have faced terrors of imagination, of unknown monsters who might at any moment rise out of the deep and devour them. About 580 Columba's friend, Cormac-of-the-Sea, afterwards Bishop of Durrow, had a dreadful experience. It was probably after visiting the Orkney

and Shetland Islands which he evangelized, that he sailed away from land for fourteen summer days and nights, till his voyage seemed to go beyond the limit of human experience, and return seemed impossible. Then awful terrors arose on every side, " for certain loathsome and dangerous creatures . . . came into sight, covering the sea, and with a terrible rush they smote the keel and sides, the stern and prow, so heavily that it seemed as though they would break through the leather sheathing of the boat. These creatures were about the size of frogs, with very terrible stings, and more like swimming than flying creatures, and they swarmed over the blades of the oars." [1] It was in this strait that Columba, in his cell at Iona, became aware that Cormac was in danger and summoned the monks to the church to pray for him. When they were assembled he addressed them, " 'Brethren,' said he, 'pray with all your usual fervour for Cormac, who by sailing too far hath passed the bounds of human enterprise and is exposed at this moment to dreadful alarm and fright. . . . Let us assist by our prayers that God may take compassion on us and cause the wind, which for the past fourteen days has blown from the south, to blow from the north, and this north wind will deliver Cormac's vessel out of all danger.' Having said this he knelt before the altar, and in a plaintive voice poured forth his prayers to the Almighty power of God who governeth the winds and all things. After having prayed he rose quickly, and wiping away his tears, joyfully gave thanks to God, saying, 'Now, brethren, let us congratulate our dear friends . . . for God will now change the south into a north wind which will free our associates from their perils and bring them to us here again.' As he spoke, the south wind ceased and a north wind blew for many days after, so that Cormac's ship was enabled to gain the land. And Cormac hastened to visit Columba, and in God's bounty they looked upon each other face to

[1] Probably the common jelly-fish, which have powerful stinging threads.

face, to the extreme joy and wonder of all." (II., xliii.) There is a long Dialogue in Old Irish which is supposed to have passed between Columba and Cormac at their meeting.

Colum first spoke.
Thou art welcome, O comely Cormac,
From over the all-teeming sea :
What sent thee forth : where hast thou been,
Since the time we were on the same path ?
Two years and a month to this night
Is the time thou hast been wandering from port to port,
From wave to wave : resolute the energy,
To traverse the wide ocean !
Since the sea hath sent thee hither,
Thou shalt have friendship and counsel :
Were it not for Christ's sake, Lord of the fair world,
Thou hast merited satire and reproach !

Cormac. Let there be no reproach now,
O descendant of Niall, for we are a noble race :
The sun shines in the west as in the east :
A righteous guest is entitled to reception.

Columcille. Thou art welcome, since thou hast come
From the waves of the mighty sea . . .
Though thou travel the world over,
East, west, south, ebb, flood,
Thou noble son of high-born Dima,
It is in Durrow thy resurrection shall be . . .

Cormac. O Columcille of a hundred graces,
For thou art a prophet, thou art a true poet,
Thou art learned, a scribe, happy, perfect,
And a devout, accomplished priest :
Thou art a king's son of reddened valour,
Thou art a virgin, thou art a pilgrim,
We shall abide in the West if thou desire it :
Christ will unfold his mysterious intentions.[1]

. . . . . .

But though Cormac returned "from the waves of the mighty sea," many of the intrepid mariners who

[1] Quoted from Reeves' *Adamnan.*

sailed away never came back. In the seventh century the wreck of a boat and monks belonging to the family of Hi is chronicled, and in the eighth, " the drowning of the family of Io." The monks never found the *disert* of their dreams, though they scoured the seas right round the north of Scotland. The Orkney Islands knew them and the Shetlands. Iceland itself was visited by these brave men who even sailed north till they came to the frozen sea. Celtic remains have been found on the Faroe Islands; on St Kilda there are ruins of early religious buildings and a church dedicated to Columba, whose feast-day is still kept by the inhabitants.

It was not only from winds and whirlpools that Columba had to protect his monks: the seas round Iona were visited occasionally by whales and sharks, and the monks believed that nothing but faith and the prayers of their Abbot could save them from these monsters. There is a story that when Berach, one of the brothers, was about to set off one day for Tiree, which lies twenty miles north-west of Iona, Columba said to him, " O my son, take very great care this day not to attempt sailing direct over the open sea to Tiree, but rather take a circuit and sail round by the smaller islands, for this reason, that thou be not thrown into great terror by a huge monster and hardly be able to escape." But Berach was young or heedless. At any rate, going down to the shore he jumped into his boat and hoisted his sail, forgetting or ignoring Columba's warning. When he was well out on the open sea, " a whale of huge and amazing size raised itself like a mountain, and as it floated on the surface it opened its mouth which, as it gaped, was bristling with teeth. Then the rowers, hauling in their sail, pulled back in the utmost terror and had a very narrow escape from the agitation of the waves caused by the motion of the monster." (I., xiii.)

On another occasion Baithene was sailing over to Tiree, and on going to Columba for his farewell blessing, the Saint told him about a whale which had been seen

in the neighbourhood. But Baithene was not alarmed. "The beast and I," he replied, "are under the power of God." "Go in peace then," Columba concluded, "thy faith in Christ shall defend thee from this danger." And so Baithene set sail, and after they were well over on their way to Tiree, he and his brother monks saw the whale. The others were "much terrified," but Baithene was without fear. Standing up in the prow of the boat he raised his hands and blessed the sea and the whale.

A final story of aquatic monsters shows what absolute faith Columba's monks had in him. He was crossing the River Ness on one of his journeys, when he saw the natives burying the body of a man who had been seized and bitten by a "shark" in the river (it may have been an otter or a whiskered seal: the people probably thought it one of the water-kelpies they dreaded so much). Columba wanted to cross the river, but the boat lay on the other side. He commanded one of his monks to swim over and fetch it, and the man at once jumped into the river and began swimming across. "But the monster, far from being satiated, was only roused for more prey, and was lying at the bottom of the stream. When it felt the water disturbed above by the man swimming, it suddenly rushed out, and giving an awful roar, darted after him with its mouth wide open. . . . Then the blessed man observing this, raised his holy hand, while all the rest were stupified with terror, and invoking the name of God he formed the saving sign of the Cross in the air and commanded the ferocious monster saying, 'Thou shalt go no further, nor touch the man! Go back with all speed!'" At the voice of the Saint, the shark was terrified, and rushed down the river, although it had been so near the swimmer that "there was not more than the length of a spear-staff between the man and the beast. Even the barbarous heathens who were present," writes Adamnan, "were forced by the greatness of this miracle . . . *to magnify the God of the Christians.*"

This is Adamnan's constant refrain after relating the miracles of Columba. And it is an important point, for it was as much by these miracles that he converted the people, as by his preaching, probably even more. It is strange that Adamnan gives us no example at all of Columba's preaching: all the utterances of Columba's that we have, are spoken on some such occasion as this, when in a practical way he has shown forth the greatness of God. That appealed to the people of those days far more than any preaching could have done, for they saw what Columba's God could do for those who believed in Him.

Of the islands which lay near Iona, Columba had most to do with Tiree, known in his time as *Ethica Terra*, or the *Low-Lying Land of Barley*, a long low island about twenty miles north-west of Iona. The light of Christianity had shone on Tiree even before Columba's day: a monastery had been founded there by Comgall of Bangor, who after being repeatedly assailed by Pictish enemies, left the island in despair. And Brendan of Clonfort, the Sailor Monk, had laid out a church and village on Tiree, but his foundation, too, had vanished.

Tiree is about eleven miles long and from one to three broad. As its ancient name, *The Land of Barley* implied, it was a fertile island from which the monastery of Iona drew much of its grain and other food. An old Gaelic saying bears witness to its fertility:

> Tiree would give the two crops
> Were it not for fear of the two rents.

When Columba founded his first monastery there, a penitential establishment called *Campus Lunge*, Baithene was sent to take charge of it. (The modern name, *Soroby* is of Scandinavian origin.) We hear of Columba sending penitents to Tiree to work out their sentence; as, for instance, in the case of a certain man who had fallen into a great crime, and had arrived at Iona with tears of repentance: after making open confession of his

sins, he was comforted by Columba and sent over to Baithene in Tiree with the assurance that his sincere repentance was accepted by Christ. Columba could be very gentle to sinners who really repented: on this occasion he shed tears over the penitent and encouraged him: "Arise, my son," he said, "be comforted! The sins thou hast committed are forgiven thee because it is written, 'a humble and a contrite heart God doth not despise.'" (I., xxiv.)

There is mention of Tiree in an account of a thunderstorm Columba watched from Iona and saw pass over to *Ethica*. It is in accordance with the times in which he lived that he regarded the black, menacing thunderclouds and the flashes of lightning as "a very black host of demons fighting against him with iron darts. These wicked demons wished . . . to attack his monastery and kill with the same spears many of the brethren. But he, single-handed against innumerable foes fought with the utmost bravery, having received the armour of the Apostle Paul. . . ." When the Saint was returning to his monastery weary with his labours in driving the devils from his island, he spoke to his companion about these hostile legions. "Those deadly foes," he said, "who this day have been put to flight from this small tract of land, have fled to Tiree, and there as savage invaders they will attack the monasteries of the brethren and cause pestilential diseases of which many will be grievously ill and die." Two days later he announced, "Baithene hath managed wisely with God's help: that the congregation over which he hath been appointed by God to preside in the plain of Lunge, should be defended by fasts and prayers against the attacks of the demons, and but one person shall die on this occasion."

This story is a good example of how pagan superstition still dominated the mind of Columba: he could not get away from the beliefs held for centuries by his ancestors, that storms and tempests were manifestations of the Evil One, but he attributed his deliverance and

that of Baithene and his monks, to the hand of God, whose aid they had implored both by prayer and fasting. These early saints lived near to God: every good they ascribed to Him, no situation in which they found themselves was thought hopeless when they could ask Him to deliver them. Believing in the efficacy of prayer, they prayed in no half-hearted fashion; finding themselves in difficulty, they instinctively asked the help of the Almighty, not omitting at the same time to help themselves.

Another island which Columba often visited was Hinba or Eilean-na-Naoimh, the Isle of Saints. Hinba is now identified with Elachnave, the most southerly of the Garvelloch Islands which lie in the Firth of Lorne, off Argyllshire. Elachnave is about a mile in length and has remains of a very early monastic settlement which may have been founded even before Columba's time, perhaps by the famous Brendan, who had sailed these seas before Columba came to Iona and had founded a church on Culbrandon, another island of the Garvelloch group.

Columba used Hinba as a refuge for those who wished to live a more retired life than that offered by the larger settlement of Iona, and his uncle, Ernan, was Abbot of Hinba for a short time. There were no inhabitants on the rocky islet except the inmates of the monastery, and owing to its remoteness and inaccessibility, the drystone buildings there are in a better state of preservation than those of more frequented places. It is possible that one of the beehive cells still to be seen entire, may be the actual hermitage occupied by Columba: it is at any rate one of the earliest known examples of that style of building. The spring on the island is called Columcille's Well, and a great pile of stones is said to be the tomb of Eithne, Columba's mother. He loved the solitude of Elachnave and often went there when his mind was harassed and wearied, and he had problems to think out. The absolute quiet of his lonely island refreshed him; the voyage itself was invigorating, all the more if the elements were in

turbulent mood and the sail a trial of skill against them. The voyage to Elachnave can still be made from Iona in an open boat as Columba made it, when conditions are favourable, but it is a long sail and often an adventurous one. It was while staying at Elachnave that Columba had the dream commanding him to crown Aidan king of the Scots, and it was to Elachnave—called for that reason the Isle of Saints—that his four friends, Comgall, Cainnech, Brendan, and Cormac came from Ireland to seek him.

Columba was twice in the island of Skye, where there are traces of his visit in Church dedications and in place names. "Of the exact itinerary of the Saint's wanderings in Skye . . . we know nothing. But the influence of this wonderful man of the gentle nature and the strong persuasive will, must have affected the Skyemen of that day deeply. He and his monks were true Celts. Their holy rites replaced those of the Druids. Their chants made the magic runes die away. They held out a true hope to those whose light, in religious matters, had been so largely darkness. And in Skye, as in all the Western Isles, the echoes of their holy liturgies sounded in many a green glen and mingled with the noise of dashing waves and the long wash of Hebridean seas." [1]

The Bay of Portree used to be called Loch Columkille, and there is a small island in the bay also called after the Saint, which still shows traces of a church probably founded by Columba himself. There are two other churches dedicated to him, one at the head of Loch Snizort and another near Monkstadt, where there was formerly a shallow loch with a little island in the centre of it. The loch has now been drained and the monastery buildings can easily be reached. It was a large settlement that Columba founded there. The island on which the ruins stood "is nearly three acres in extent, and its whole surface is covered with rough blocks of grey lichen-covered stones, remains of monastic cells.

[1] MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye*, p. 288.

There are a few traces of buildings—which may be of any age, so old do they appear, so covered with moss—as well as of a cashel or surrounding wall. . . . The place where the loch was, seems a deserted solitude, dotted only with rough Highland cattle and rendered still more solitary by the ruined heaps of stone. . . . The matin bell rings no longer: the monks no more go forth to pray or to work: time and change have made a solitude and called it peace. The sea is moaning far below, the ruins of an ancient Christianity are unspeakably sad: did Columba and his monks labour only for this?—But a lark is carolling high in the air: it suggests more cheerful thoughts, and one remembers that Columba's work lives on in the hearts of men and did not fail when the monastery became a ruin." [1]

There is an interesting story about Columba baptizing an aged heathen chieftain in Skye. This man was a Pict called Artbranan, who, although he was a heathen, had lived a blameless life; hearing of Columba and his Gospel of Peace, he wished to embrace that faith before he died. Adamnan puts the picture clearly before us:—the aged chieftain arriving in his boat, sitting up at the prow as his men row him into the harbour. Two of them carry him up the shore to where Columba stands, and lay their chief down before him. Columba was not able to speak to him in his native tongue, whether he spoke a special dialect, or whether Columba had not yet mastered the Gaelic of the Isles, we do not know. At any rate Columba instructs him through an interpreter, the old man believes and is baptized. Then when the rite is administered and his mind is at rest, the aged chief passes peacefully away. (I., xxvii.) "Here," writes Professor Watson, "we have the keynote of the attitude of the Church to a whole department of pagan beliefs. . . . The rite of baptism turns the pagan natural goodness into Christian goodness." [2] There was nothing narrow in

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

[2] Watson, "The Celtic Church and its relations with Paganism,' *Celtic Review.* Nov. 1915.

Columba's creed; he was willing to recognize this old man although he did not belong to the particular branch of the Church to which Columba belonged—although he did not belong to any Church at all, simply because he was a good man.

We have one more story to tell of Columba's intercourse with the islands which surrounded his headquarters, a story which shows the Saint in a delightful aspect. One day while living at Iona, Columba called two of his monks to him: "Sail over now to Mull," he said, "and on the open ground near the sea-shore, look for Erc, a robber who came alone last night in secret from Colonsay. He tries to hide himself among the sandhills during the daytime, under his boat . . . that he may sail across at night to the little island where our young seals are brought forth and nurtured. When this furious robber has stealthily killed as many as he can, he then fills his boat and goes back to his hiding-place."

The monks did as they were told. They found the robber at the very place indicated, and sailing across to Iona, took him at once before the Saint. Columba looked at him gravely. "Why dost thou transgress the commandment of God so often by stealing the property of others?" he asked. "If thou art in want at any time, come to us, and thy needs shall be supplied." And out of the kindness of his heart Columba ordered that some fat sheep should be killed and given to the thief instead of the seals he had slain, in order that he might not return home empty. To those who think of Columba as a fierce, vindictive character, a man of strife, a soldier rather than a monk, this example of his generous forgiveness will be welcome. And that was not all. Soon after, when it was revealed to Columba that Erc was about to die, he sent a message to Baithene in Tiree, the storehouse of Iona, telling him to send a fat sheep and six pecks of corn as a last gift to the dying man. (I., xxxiii.)

We cannot go into the ecclesiastical history of all

the islands round Iona, but they were all visited by Columba and his monks. They had been the strongholds of the Christian Scots before the battle between Gabhran and Brude in 560, when the victorious Picts wrested the islands from them and waged a continual warfare against them, till with the coming of Columba and his friendship with Brude, a peace was built up between the two peoples. Columba and his monks founded monasteries on practically all the islands of that coast, and there were other founders at work too in the same district. St Moluoc "the pure, the bright, the pleasant, the Sun of Lismore," founded a church on that island. St Cathan founded one on the island of Bute at a place now called Kilchattan; and Donnan founded a church on the island of Eigg. These three men were not disciples of St Columba, but they worked in conjunction with him, as the great figure in the ecclesiastical life of the time. They were either descendants of the Church of the Picts, which Ninian had founded in Galloway and which was still sending forth missionaries, or else they were of Irish origin.

Columba predicted "red martyrdom" for Donnan and his monks, and that fate did indeed befall them. They had displeased the Pictish queen of the island—a provincial queen—by sleeping in her sheepfold, and she ordered that they should all be put to death. It is a dreadful story. The monks were celebrating the holy mysteries on Easter Sunday (617) when the queen's bloodthirsty messengers appeared at the church door. The monks were calm and brave; they asked only that they might be allowed to finish the service in which they were engaged. Something in their gentle aspect moved the murderers to acquiesce, but when the sacrament was over, all the brothers were slain. That happened after Columba's death, but it shows what times he lived in, and how often he and his monks must have risked their lives at the hands of the people among whom they worked.

Columba had a happy way of dealing with his monks,

whom he sometimes taught by parables. Once when he was visiting a monastery on the island of Eigg he came upon two monks who had been preaching in a spirit of rivalry, the one claiming to be a better preacher than the other.

"Stretch out both of you the right hand towards Heaven," said Columba. The monks did as he told them and the Saint went on:

"One of you is slightly taller than the other, but neither can come within reach of yon white cloud floating above us. To your knees, O men! Pray for one another and for the folk, and both of you will reach higher than the clouds!" Both monks fell on their knees, and their prayers "which used to stick in the thatch, mounted now like sparks of fire into the heavens. Ever after there was brotherhood between the two monks, and the brotherhood of the monks made brothers of the folk." [1]

Columba's love of the sea made his voyages among the Western Isles one of the great pleasures of his life. He loved to stand on the shore and watch the waves break on the white sands of Iona: he loved to feel the lift of the wave under his keel, to listen to the ripple of the water along the sides of his boat, to watch the showers of spray flung high into the sunshine as the prow of his coracle cut through the waves. He understood the call of the sea, as he understood its dangers. His feeling for it had perhaps something of the old pagan notion, which regarded the sea as a power to be worshipped—and also to be feared. But Columba knew his God could quell its fiercest moods, and so in embarking himself or in sending out his monks, he consecrated the voyage always to the mercy of God, in whose hands he knew there was safety whatever might befall. He followed his monks on their voyages in his thoughts and prayers, and as the time drew near when

[1] This story was recently recovered from an old man in the island of Eigg by Rev. Kenneth MacLeod of Colonsay, who has kindly allowed me to quote it.

they might be expected to return, he would go up to the highest point of Dun-I to watch for the first speck of their sail on the horizon.

The wideness of the sea, its grandeur, its freedom, its freshness, and its strength seem to have entered into the very being of Columba and to characterize his life. For centuries after his death, the mariners of the Hebrides called on kind Columcille to protect them in all their dangers and difficulties, and we can trace his influence in the *Ocean Blessing* recovered from oral tradition:

O Thou who pervadest the heights
Imprint on us Thy gracious blessing,
Carry us over the surface of the sea,
Carry us safely to the haven of peace,
Bless our boatmen and our boat,
Bless our anchors and our oars,
Each stay and halyard and traveller,
Our mainsails to our tall masts
Keep, O King of the Elements, in their place,
That we may return home in peace.
I myself will sit down at the helm,
It is God's own Son who will give me guidance,
As He gave to Columba the mild,
What time he set stay to sails.[1]

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I., 329.

CHAPTER XIII

THE APOSTLE OF CALEDONIA

THERE is no outstanding event in Columba's life after the Synod of Drumceatt, no way in which we can trace the chronological sequence of his journeys in Scotland and Ireland or among that archipelago of islands which lay within reach of Iona. He and his monks went out and in among the Picts, establishing Christian colonies and monastic settlements among them, where the people dwelt together in peace and goodwill, striving to help each other and not to look on warfare and bloodshed as the chief end of life. Columba did not force Christianity upon them: he established it quietly in their midst: he dealt with the problems confronting him, not by harsh or overbearing methods, but by showing the people a better way. He converted them not only to Christianity, but to peace among themselves. He had made it possible for the Scots to live on terms of mutual self-respect with the Picts, whose monarch, King Brude, was one of Columba's staunchest friends and upholders. He had freed the Scots from paying tribute money to the mother country: he had secured their independence and thus established the first kingdom of the Scots. We cannot but admire his forcefulness in carrying through all he had set himself to do. He was dauntless, tireless, full of that enthusiasm which acknowledges no defeat.

Although Columba was constantly leaving Iona to attend to his interests in other parts of Scotland, we have no reason to suppose he ever went into England, and it is improbable that he ever left the British Isles. There is a legend of his visiting Gregory the Great at Rome,

but owing to the great age of the Saint at the only time when the visit could have taken place, we need not seriously consider it. Then there is a tradition that Columba made a pilgrimage from Derry to the tomb of St Martin of Tours, and on his return brought back with him the Gospel that had lain for a hundred years on the breast of the Founder of British Monasticism. This legend has many picturesque features: it tells us how when Columba arrived at Tours, he found that the people had lost all trace of the exact spot where St Martin was buried. Knowing by repute of the great holiness and miraculous powers of Columba, they asked him to discover it for them. Columba consented on condition that everything found in the grave, except the bones of the Saint, should belong to him and be carried back by him to sanctify his monastery in Ireland. The basis for this legend is probably that sixty years after the death of Patrick, Columba enshrined the relics of his forerunner. Three precious things were found in the tomb: a bell, a cup, and a copy of the Gospels. Patrick was related to St Martin, at least legend says that he was, also that he visited St Martin who was the instigator of his mission to Ireland. It is probable that it was the Gospel which had lain on Patrick's breast that Columba took to Derry, though it was known as the Gospel of St Martin, and was one of the chief treasures of the Church of Derry as late as the twelfth century.

The death of Brude in 584 was a blow to Columba, for Brude had helped him and encouraged him in all his northern enterprises. It is curious to see how Adamnan makes excuses for the fact that a friend of Columba's should have died at all. The reason he gives is that the white pebble Columba had sent to him at an earlier date, to cure Broichan, had been mislaid. This amulet had been blessed by Columba as "a certain cure for all diseases," but it also had the faculty of being mislaid, "when looked for by those persons whose term of life had arrived." When Brude lay dying and

the pebble was called for, "it was not to be found in the place where previously it had been laid." And so Brude died.

He was succeeded by Gartnaidh of the race of the southern Picts who had been converted by St Ninian more than a century earlier. Gartnaidh was very likely a Christian before he became king of the Picts, at any rate he was in sympathy with Christianity and not many years after he became king, he built a church at Abernethy, where nearly a hundred years earlier King Nectan had founded a church in memory of St Bridget. That early church had practically died out, but Brude's successor re-established it, prompted to do so, no doubt, by the influence of Columba. The *Amhra Coluimcille*, in relating all the wonderful deeds of Columba, mentions him as "the teacher who used to teach the tribes that were around Tai . . . a river in Alban; who subdued to benediction the mouths of the fierce ones who dwelt with Tai's High-King." It seems certain therefore that Columba preached among the southern Picts, and that Abernethy which stands on the Tay, was a centre of ecclesiastical activity. Cainnech was with Columba on that journey and founded a church at or near St Andrews then called Kilri-mont, the Church-of-the-Royal-Mount. It was probably while working in this district that Columba founded his church on the island in the Forth, the Island of Columba, or Inch-Colm.

When we consult the list of churches founded by our Saint (see Appendix), we see that he travelled all over Scotland from the Orkneys right down to Wigtownshire. It is impossible to ascertain whether churches named after him were actually founded by him, or by his monks after his death. He is said to have founded one hundred churches "which the wave frequents," that is on the sea-coast, but there is no need to think the Saint himself visited all these places, although his travelling activities were enormous. He and his disciples found their way into the wildest glens of Caledonia as

well as to the farthest isles of the ocean. Wherever they went, settlements were established on the pattern of the monastery of Iona, and from each of these centres again, the monks went out to preach the Gospel. We can imagine the thoughts of these brave men as they traversed the wilds of northern Scotland, not knowing what danger of enemy or wild beast might lie in wait for them. The *Prayer for Travelling*, recently recovered from the traditional Gaelic, may have had its origin long ago in the minds of Columban monks:

Life be in my speech,
Sense in what I say,
The bloom of cherries on my lips,
Till I come back again.

The love Jesus Christ gave
Be filling every heart for me,
The love Jesus Christ gave
Filling me for every one.

Traversing corries, traversing forests,
Traversing valleys long and wild,
The fair white Mary still uphold me,
The Shepherd Jesus be my shield,

The fair white Mary still uphold me,
The Shepherd Jesus be my shield.[1]

Columba's life witnesses to the incessant coming and going at Iona. He was in constant communication with his distant settlements; when he could not go himself to visit outlying members of his family, he sent his monks to carry his commands. And sometimes he left Iona, not on his own business, but to visit the monasteries of his friends, as when he and a band of his disciples went to Glasgow "to rejoice in the light of Kentigern," his great contemporary (518-603 *circa*).

When Columba was about to found a new monastery, he had first of all to obtain a grant of land from the chief on whose territory he wished to settle. There is

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I., p. 321.

a good account of such a transaction in the Book of Deer, which tells of the founding of two churches in the north. "Columcille, and Drostan his pupil, came from Iona as God had shown them unto Aberdour, and Bede the Pict was mormær (overlord) of Buchan before them and it was he that gave them that town in freedom for ever. . . . They came after that to the other town and it was pleasing to Columcille, because it was full of God's grace and he asked of the mormær, to wit Bede, that he should give it to him: and he did not give it: and a son of his took an illness after refusing the clerics, and he was nearly dead. After this the mormær went to intreat the clerics that they should make prayer for the son that health should come to him, and he gave in offering to them (the town). . . . They made the prayer, and health came to him. After that Columcille gave to Drostan that town, and blessed it and left as his word, "Whosoever should come against it, let him not be many-yeared victorious." Drostan's tears (deara) came on parting with Columcille. Said Columcille, "Let Dear be its name henceforward."[1] This story gives us a good example of the pagan ideas then prevailing as to the propitiation of the Deity: when the son of the chief became ill after he had refused Columba the site for his monastery, the chief at once took his son's illness as a sign of Divine displeasure, and hastened to comply with the Saint's request.

On that occasion, Columba went with his monk to help him to found his monastery, and only left him when all his difficulties were overcome. In later years Columba had to send his monks alone, for he could not possibly visit every new foundation himself. But his genius in securing the right men to be his deputies was one of the features of his missionary work. His

[1] Book of Deer, p. 91. This legend is disputed by Mr Scott in his recent book, *The Pictish Nation*, 1919. The story shows, however, the necessary preliminaries to the founding of a church in those days.

personality attracted the keenest minds, and his judgment of character led him to form shrewd opinions as to who would be most tactful and kindly in dealing with the people. Columba was the Superior over the whole Order, but each abbot in charge of his monasteries was trusted by the founder: Columba understood the greatness of human nature and how it develops best under trust and responsibility.

And so he and his monks worked on till every glen and every island knew them. On his journeys Columba stayed sometimes with a poor peasant, sometimes with a great chief, but everyone he met he contrived to help. He had a genius for dealing with strangers, he drew them out and showed a real interest in their affairs, a genuine sympathy with their distresses. He was always trying to be of use to the people among whom he lived: when he saw them working under difficulties, he at once set himself to solve them. He studied the world in which he lived, he tried to fathom the laws of nature, to teach the people to use their intellect as well as their nets and spears in the catching of fish and game. Setting his mind to work on various problems, he discovered many things far ahead of his time, and these discoveries came to rank as miracles in the eyes of the natives. The so-called miracle stories of his causing springs of water to gush forth, of his moderating the flow of rivers so that salmon could get up them, of his converting a tree of bitter apples into a useful fruit-tree (p. 142)—all these may be put down to the unbounded gratitude of a primitive people who, because they did not understand the methods Columba employed, ascribed the welcome results to miraculous causes. O'Donnell seems better to have understood his hero's power of thinking out and solving problems. Writing of his deflecting the waters of a river to allow the fish to get up, O'Donnell says: "And Columba saw there could be none such abundance except the fish be free to go and come across the waterfall from the river to the great sea. . . . And he bound the stones of the rocks of the

northern side, to abase them that the fish might pass." (§ 134.) Columba also probably possessed some form of magnetism, which the world does not yet understand, but to explain which the early writers were driven to invent miracles. Great men appeal to our better natures by channels we neither know nor command; we feel their influence upon us but we cannot explain exactly what it is. His generous nature, his simple kindness to men and women and children, added to this peculiar magnetism, made everyone with whom he came in contact fall under the spell of his personality. He did not trouble about doctrines or dogmas: his creed was a simple one, belief in God and His power to help man, not only in the great things of life, but in his everyday work, in husbandry and fishing, in sowing and reaping. In any age, in any land, Columba must have been a great man. But when he came to Scotland it had known no organized Christianity: it was governed and inhabited by bands of comparatively lawless Celts who had the germ of a great people in them, but who, without civilization and with a religion of superstition, were merely a conglomeration of different elements with no ideal before them, nothing to look forward to. Columba changed all that. His was a robust religion in a robust age. He, too, could be meek and gentle, but for the times and country he worked in, it was essential that the Apostle of Caledonia should have a bold belief to appeal to a hardy and vigorous race. Small wonder that the people worshipped him who could cure their diseases, heal their feuds, increase the productivity of their land, and by his miracles prove to them the existence of a God more powerful than all the gods they had known. Columba was in this more fortunate than the missionaries of our own day: if any one was incredulous of the power of his God, he would at once perform a miracle to convince him. And it was well known in the Highlands that he held converse with angels.

We must now go back with him for the last time to

Iona. There he ruled supreme, none disputing his authority. No wonder that in such a position he occasionally showed some haughtiness of temper and wielded his great authority somewhat despotically. He could not have accomplished his great work had he not known how to rule, and the people respected him all the more that he gave his orders with the assurance of one who expected to be obeyed.

But he could be humble too. There is a tradition that he asked only to be allowed to keep the smallest door in Paradise, so long as he was in God's house and could see His glory and hear His voice.

CHAPTER XIV

COLUMBA'S WRITINGS

ALTHOUGH Columba was famed as a scribe, and most of his "diligence in writing" was occupied in copying the Sacred Books, yet he was a poet at heart, and when anything greatly moved him he sought outlet for his feelings in poetry. He wrote both in Latin and in Irish, and his Irish poems, being wrung from him at times of great emotion, show his love of country and of nature and his absolute trust in God. They probably came down through several centuries by oral tradition, as Columcille's words were held to guard those who recited them against many kinds of evil—"The devil would not know their path to waylay them: their enemies would fail to find them: angels would attend them as they sung the poem: it was a protection against sudden death: peace would reign in the house where it was chanted, and plenty and prosperity would wait on the singers."[1] This was of course carrying on the pagan superstition of Druid incantations, but in a Christian form: Columba's disciples and their converts learnt his poems by heart and recited them when in any danger. Although these Irish poems are not now in the form in which he left them, they undoubtedly represent Columba's thoughts and feelings. Twenty-six have been edited, there are many more in manuscript in the Bodleian Library and a few in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, but the authenticity of these is not assured.[2]

[1] Dowden, *Celtic Church in Scotland*, 322.

[2] Quotations from Columba's Irish poems have been made as they occur chronologically, pp. 15, 26, 32, 35, 39, 116, 131.

Of his Latin writings, only three have come down to us. They are cast in a more serious vein than the Irish poems, and partake rather of the nature of studied theological treatises, than of Celtic poetry. The first hymn, the *Altus Prosator*, is a dignified and poetic statement of the Creation, the Fall, the Judgment and the Future State. It is sometimes said to have been written as reparation for the battles fought on Columba's behalf, or at least under his protection, but O'Donnell gives another legend—that when Gregory's envoys visited Iona bringing Columba a great cross from the Pope, and there was in the monastery no food or drink to put before these distinguished visitors, Columba wrote the *Altus* in thanks to God for miraculously providing food and drink, and thus saving Iona's widespread reputation for hospitality. This legend is another instance of how O'Donnell and the other early writers, in their anxiety to glorify their hero, translated dreams and visions into actual incidents. O'Donnell felt the dignity of the *Altus* which he describes as a "composition passing lofty and passing noble, but passing hard of understanding," and he adds that, "whosoever should recite the *Altus* daily should not be damned forever." [1] Authorities do not question that the *Altus* is the genuine work of Columba, and the late Marquess of Bute, who edited it with a prose translation, considered its intrinsic merits to be very great, especially the last verses which he thought "would not suffer by comparison with the *Dies Iræ*." [2]

An interesting point about Columba's Latin poems is that he attempted rhyme in them, probably in order that his disciples might find them easier to remember, so that he was ahead of his time in poetry as well as in learning and practical things, for rhyme was new, if not unknown, in Europe at that time. The following lines show the attempt at rhyme:

[1] O'Donnell, § 216.

[2] Bute, *Altus of St Columba*, iv.

Altus Prosator Vetustus
Dierum et Ingenitus
Erat Absque origine
Primordio et crepidine

. . . . .

As well as being rhymed, the *Altus* has the first letter of every verse arranged in alphabetical succession as a further aid to memory. I am generously permitted by the Rev. E. C. Trenholme, the author of *The Story of Iona*, to quote the late Canon Mitchell's metrical version of the poem: this translation first appeared in Bishop Dowden's *Celtic Church in Scotland*, but was revised for Mr Trenholme's book.

Ancient of days, enthroned on high!
The Father unbegotten He,
Whom space containeth not, nor time,
Who was and is and aye shall be:
And one-born Son, and Holy Ghost,
Who co-eternal glory share;
One only God, of Persons Three,
We praise, acknowledge, and declare.

Beings celestial first He made;
Angels and archangels of light,
In Principalities and Thrones,
And mystic rank of Power and Might:
That love and Mystery Divine
Not aimlessly alone might dwell,
But vessels have wherein to pour
Full wealth of gifts ineffable.

Cast from the highest heights of heaven,
Far from the angels shining state,
Fadeth from glory Lucifer,
Falling in scorn infatuate.
Angels apostate share his fall,
Steeled with his hate and fired with pride,
Banishèd from their fellows bright,
Who in the heavenly seats abide.

Direful and foul, the Dragon great,
Whose deadly rage was known of old,
The slippery serpent, wilier
Than living thing that earth doth hold :
From the bright realm of heaven he could,
A third part of the stars entice,
In Hell's abyss to quench their light,
In headlong fall from Paradise.

Earth next and Heaven, sea and sky,
Found shape within the Eternal mind,
And stood created. Next appeared
The fruitful herb and tree in kind :
Sun, moon and stars that climb the heavens,
And birds and fishes great and small,
And beasts and herds and living things,
And man to be the king of all.

From every glad Angelic tongue,
Soon as the stars sprang into light,
Burst forth the wondering shout that praised
The Heavenly Creator's might.
And, as His handiwork they viewed,
Arose from loving hearts and free
The tribute due of wondrous song,
Swelling in sweetest harmony.

'Gainst Satan's wiles and Hell's assault
Our primal parents could not stand :
And into new abysses fell
The leader and his horrid band :
Fierce forms, with noise of beating wings,
Too dread for sight of mortal eye,
Who, fettered, far from human ken,
Within their prison houses lie.

Him, banished from his first estate,
The Lord cast out for evermore ;
And now his wild and rebel crew
In upper air together soar.
Invisible lest men should gaze
On wickedness without a name,
And, breaking every barrier down,
Defile themselves in open shame.

In the three quarters of the sea
Three mighty fountains hidden lie,
Whence rise through whirling water-spouts
Rich-laden clouds that clothe the sky:
On winds from out his treasure-house
They speed to swell bud, vine and grain,
While the sea-shallows emptied wait
Until the tides return again.

Kings' earthly glory fleeteth fast,
And for a moment is its stay.
God hath all might; and at a nod
The giants fall beneath his sway.
'Neath waters deep, with mighty pangs,
In fires and torments dread they rave,
Choked in the whirlpool's angry surge,
Dashed on the rocks by every wave.

Like one that through a sparing sieve
The precious grain doth slowly pour,
God sendeth down upon the earth
The cloud-bound waters evermore:
And from the fruitful breasts of heaven,
While changing seasons wax and wane,
The welcome streams that never fail
Pour forth in rich supplies of rain.

Mark how the power of God supreme
Hath hung aloft earth's giant ball,
And fixed the great encircling deep,
His mighty hand supporting all
Upon the pillars which he made,
The solid rocks and cliffs that soar,
And on the sure foundations rest
That stand unmoved for evermore.

None doubteth that within the earth
Glow the devouring flames of hell,
Wherein is prisoned darkest night
Where noisome beasts and serpents dwell,
Gehenna's old and awful moan,
And cries of men in anguish dire,
And falling tears and gnashing teeth,
And thirst, and hunger's burning fire.

Of realms we read beneath the world
Where the departed spirits wait,
Who never cease to bend the knee
To Christ, the only Potentate.
They could not ope the written Book,
Whose seven seals none but He might break,
Fulfilling thus the prophet's word,
That He should come, and victory make.

Paradise and its pleasant glades
From the beginning God did make;
Out of whose fountain-head there flow
Four rivers sweet, earth's thirst to slake;
And midmost stands the tree of life,
With leaves that neither fade nor fall,
With healing to the nations fraught,
Whose joys abundant never pall.

Questions the Singer,—"Who hath climbed
Sinai the mountain of the Lord?
The echoing thunders who hath heard,
And ringing trumpet-blast outpoured?
Who saw the lightning's dazzle whirl,
And heaving rocks that crashed and fell,
'Mid meteors glare and darts of flame,
Save Moses, Judge of Israel?"

Riseth the dawn:—the day is near,
Day of the Lord, the King of kings;
A day of wrath and vengeance just,
Of darkness, clouds and thunderings;
A day of anguished cries and tears,
When glow of woman's love shall pale;
When man shall cease to strive with man,
And all the world's desire shall fail.

Soon shall all mortals trembling stand
Before the Judge's awful throne,
And rendering the great account,
Shudder each hateful sin to own.
Horror of night! when none can work,
Wailing of men, and flooding tears,
Opening the books by conscience writ,
Riving of hearts with guilty fears.

The trumpet of the archangel first
Shall blare afar its summons dread;
And then shall burst earth's prison bars,
And sepulchres give up their dead.
The ice of death shall melt away,
Whilst dust grows flesh, and bone meets bone,
And every spirit finds again
The frame that was before her own.

Wanders Orion from heaven's height,
To thread his hidden eastern way
—Ere set the gleaming Pleiades—
Through bounds of ocean, day by day;
And Vesper, though his orbit's whirl
Be set twice twelve moons to endure,
One even by ancient paths returns,
—Types both of Him who cometh sure. [1]

Xrist the Most High from heaven descends,
The Cross His sign and banner bright.
The sun in darkness shrouds his face,
The moon no more pours forth her light:
The stars upon the earth shall fall
As figs drop from the parent tree,
When earth's broad space is bathed in fire,
And men to dens and mountains flee.

Yonder in heaven the angel host
Their ever-ringing anthem raise,
And flash in maze of holy dance,
The Trinity Divine to praise:
The four-and-twenty elders cast
Their crowns before the Lamb on high,
And the four Beasts all full of eyes
Their ceaseless triple praises cry.

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[1] Mr Trenholme in a note on this verse says, "In the daily motion of the stars, Orion sets a little before the Pleiades. The thought is that he only disappears to reappear from his hidden course below the ocean horizon and is thus a type of the Second Advent. So is the planet Venus whose movements bring it back to the same position in the heavens in 584 days. . . . These things were known in Columba's time, and he himself is said to have been versed in astronomical knowledge."

Zeal of the Lord, consuming fire,
Shall 'whelm the foes, amazed and dumb
Whose stony hearts will not receive
That Christ hath from the Father come:
But we shall soar our Lord to meet,
And so with Him shall ever be,
To reap the due rewards amidst
The glories of Eternity.

According to O'Donnel's legend, the *Altus* was taken to Rome by Gregory's messengers to Columba, and while it was being read to the Pope, he saw a vision as of angels listening. But he thought one verse alone insufficient to pay due homage to the Redeemer, and so, tradition says, Columba wrote the second of his Latin hymns, *In Te, Christe.* It is a slighter effort, and its authenticity is not assured. The third hymn, the *Noli Pater* was composed during a thunderstorm to protect an oak-wood which was being burnt down by a lightning-kindled fire, and so the poem was credited with protecting whosoever recited it from fire or thunderstorms or lightning.

Columba's poems were written with a double purpose: they were to act as charms against evil, as well as to express the poet's thoughts and feelings. In reading them we feel that the Gael craved no small blessing when he asked, in the words of the old Gaelic couplet, for

The tongue of Columba in my head,
The eloquence of Columba in my speech.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST YEARS

Thou angel of God who hast charge of me
From the dear Father of mercifulness,
The shepherding kind of the fold of the saints mighty
To make round about me this night.

Drive from me every temptation and danger,
Surround me on the sea of unrighteousness,
And in the narrows, crooks and straits
Keep Thou my coracle, keep Thou it always.

Be thou a bright flame before me,
Be thou a guiding star above me,
Be thou a smooth path below me,
And be a kindly shepherd behind me,
To-day, to-night and for ever.

I am tired and I am a stranger,
Lead thou me to the land of angels,
For me it is time to go home,
To the court of Christ, to the peace of heaven. [1]

It was in the year 593, after Columba had been thirty years in Iona, that he said very earnestly to his monks one morning, "To-day I wish to go alone to the western plain of the island. Let none of you therefore follow me." And he set out alone, walking southwards till he came to the track that leads over the high ground to the western plain. Climbing up this gentle slope between the little grassy knolls on either side, he now and then caught glimpses of the sea and of the hills of

[1] Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I. 49.

Mull. His mind was full of wonder at the beauty of this island to which God had guided his coracle, and in which he now knew he was to end his earthly pilgrimage. Coming to the top of the hill, he began the gradual descent over Machar towards the wide beach where the Atlantic breakers surge and roll. Presently he came to the Great Hill of the Fairies, a beautiful knoll, the gentle slopes of which were clothed in soft green turf, "full of thyme and wild clovers." Columba turned off the track and climbed to the top of this little eminence, and as he stood there he thought he was alone save for the good angels who always surrounded him. But one of his monks who was of a "cunning and prying disposition" had followed him. He may perhaps be forgiven his disobedience in following his master, on account of the description he has left us of what he saw:—

"Holy angels, the citizens of the heavenly country, clad in white robes and flying with wonderful speed, began to stand around the Saint as he prayed: and after a short converse with the blessed man, that heavenly host, as if feeling itself detected, flew speedily back again to the highest heavens. The blessed man himself also, after his meeting with the angels, returned to the monastery and calling the brethren together . . . asked with no little chiding and reproof, which of them was guilty of violating his command. When all were declaring they did not know at all of the matter, the brother, conscious of his inexcusable transgression and no longer able to conceal his guilt, fell on his knees before the Saint, in the midst of the assembled brothers, and humbly craved forgiveness. The Saint, taking him aside, commanded him under heavy penalties, as he knelt, never during the life of the blessed man to disclose to any person even the least part of the secret regarding the angels visit." (III., xvii.)

That little eminence is now known as the Angels' Hill, *Collicus Angelorum* or in Gaelic, *Cnoc Angel.* Even in the twentieth century the angels are not far from that

lovely spot.[1] As one lies on the soft turf of the Angels' Hill, the larks pouring out their song in the heavens, the sun gleaming along his golden pathway over the Atlantic, peace seems to flow into the soul and fill it, just as many hundred years ago it filled the soul of the blessed Columcille. In the midst of so great beauty the soul finds rest in the heart of nature, "which is in a sense the heart of God." The early Celts had caught the germ of truth when they worshipped the powers of nature, the hills, the sea, the sky and the sunshine, manifestations of the goodness of God to his children.

Columba had many visions towards the end of his life: his thoughts were more than ever in higher regions, and as his bodily strength failed, the balance of his interest was transferred more and more to that blessed country towards which he was fast travelling. There are legends of how at night the monks would see a bright light streaming out of the window of the church, and of how one night when a monk, burning with the love of God, went to the church to pray, he saw Columba come in "and along with him . . . a golden light that came down from the highest heavens and filled that part of the church." (III., xx.)

On one of his last visits to Hinba, the Isle of Saints, he spent three days and nights in his own little hut, without eating or drinking, and during that time the grace of the Holy Ghost was communicated to him abundantly and unspeakably . . . "his hut was filled with heavenly brightness . . . through the chinks of the doors and keyholes, rays of surpassing brilliancy were seen to issue during the night. Certain spiritual songs also which had never been heard before, he was heard to sing. He came to see . . . many secrets hidden from men . . . certain very obscure and difficult parts of sacred Scripture also were made quite

[1] This hill was formerly surmounted by a stone circle with a standing stone in the centre, and was probably an ancient place of burial. It was round this hill that the inhabitants used to practise the *deasil* rite on Michaelmas Day.

plain and clearer than the light to the eye of his pure heart." He grieved that his beloved disciple Baithene was not with him, "because then he would have heard difficult parts of the Scripture explained and could have imparted his knowledge to the rest of mankind." (III., xix.)

It was in such lofty realms that Columba passed the last years of his life. We trace in his conduct then, something of the idea that inspired the saints of the Middle Ages to starve and abuse their bodies, thinking that by so doing the light of their souls would shine the brighter, that the more they suffered, the nearer they were to Christ. Columba had never allowed himself any luxury: he had always lived hard and lain hard, but now he brought his tired body into further subjection. In the Old Irish *Life* we read how he used to recite the Psalms, standing, as a penance in the sea:

> The three fifties, great the profit,
> In the night, much was the pain,
> In the sea beside Scotland
> Before the sun would rise.

"Now when he would lie down in the sand with a sheet wrapt round him, the track of his ribs was apparent through his sheet *ut poeta dixit*:

> Clear he used to lie in the sand
> In his bed—great was his distress.
> The track of his ribs through his raiment
> Was manifest when the wind would blow it.

And he used not to drink ale or partake of meat, or eat condiment, as Dallan Forgaill said in the *Amhra* . . . and two hundred genuflexions he used to make every day, as Dallan said: 'He kept vigil while he lived, and he had no love of wealth'" . . .[1]

All his life long Columba had laboured with the full strength of mind and body; from the number of churches he founded and caused to be founded, we can

[1] Stokes, *Lives of the Saints*, from the Book of Lismore, p. 316.

see that his thirty years of missionary work from Iona were arduous years. His physical strength was extraordinary, but he had spent it lavishly in the service of Christ, his Druid. His tremendous journeys by land and sea could only have been made by a man of great physical endurance: his long tramps through the wild mountainous regions of the north, his voyages over the tempestuous seas of that dangerous coast—all these would have daunted any but the stoutest heart. Columba took no care for his body, but it served him well. Many and rigorous were the fasts he kept, many the nights he rose from his stone pillow to spend hours on his knees in the church, praying that the work given him to do might go on and prosper to God's greater glory.

It was when he had attained the allotted span of threescore years and ten that Columba began to feel his strength fail him. That is not a great age—" in the island where he lived and died," writes the Rev. Archibald MacMillan, the minister of Iona, " the present generation of men, now passing away, are not worn out at eighty. Even at ninety they are not frail. But Columba had borne the burden and heat of the day. . . . Constant exposure to all weathers in a climate proverbial for ' vapours, clouds and storms ' : long weary journeys through a country that could only be traversed on foot, ' in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, . . . in perils by the heathen, . . . in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, . . . in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without . . . the care of all the churches ' (2 Corinthians, xi., 26). These hardships and anxieties of life fall to the pioneer in all ages. The body is worn out long before the mental vision has grown dim. This seems to have happened in St Columba's case." [1]

It was about this time that while Columba was sitting in his hut one day, the two messengers who were waiting

[1] Rev. Archibald MacMillan, *Iona*, p. 11.

as usual to do his will, saw his face light up as if he had seen some joyful vision. Then in a little while, the splendour seemed to fade, leaving him suddenly old and sad. The monks were alarmed and asked him the cause of his sudden joy and his equally sudden sadness. Columba turned to them, "Go in peace," he said, "and do not ask me now to explain the cause of either that joy or that sadness." But they implored him to tell them what had affected him so deeply, for they could not help noticing his growing weakness and they were full of anxiety. Finally they persuaded him: "On account of my love for you," he said, "I do not wish you to be in sadness. . . . On this very day thirty years of my sojourn in Britain have been completed. For many days past I have been devoutly praying the Lord to release me from my dwelling here at the end of this thirtieth year, and to call me thither to my heavenly fatherland. And this was the cause of that joy of mine. . . . For I saw the holy angels sent down from that lofty throne to meet me. . . .

"But behold now they are stopped suddenly . . . because the thing which God granted me . . . namely that I might pass from the world to Him on this day—He hath changed in a moment in His listening to the prayers of so many churches for me. . . . So that four years from this day are added for me to abide in the flesh." (III., xxiii.)

And so the aged Columba had to face four years of weakness, a hard trial to a man of his energy. He would look on them as sent to teach him patience, to curb that proud spirit which had never before been held back from any enterprise for lack of bodily strength.

The evening of his life was spent at Iona. Columba thought much about the future of his Church, planning so that his death should not cause any slackening of effort for the conversion of the whole country. And he took a greater interest than ever in the work of the farm and in the general welfare of his monks. It had always been their custom as they returned from the

day's toil, to stop at the abbot's hut, to receive his blessing on themselves and on their work. As a mark of his humility Columba would often wash the feet of the brothers, wearied with their labours, and they prized his blessing and his care all the more now, for they saw that he was not long to be with them and their hearts were heavy. One day Columba told his monks not to come to his hut that evening for the usual blessing. But Berchan, one of the young and heedless brothers, disobeyed his commands, and at dead of night stole softly up to Columba's hut and put his eye to the keyhole. The hut was filled with such brightness that Berchan could not look upon it, and fled in terror. Next morning Columba rebuked him solemnly, saying that had it not been that he had prayed for him, Berchan's eyes would have been torn out of their sockets by the brilliance of that heavenly light. "But thy face," added the Saint, "shall burn with shame all the days of thy life, for thy disobedience." (III., xxii.)

There is a beautiful legend of how Columba's love for his monks surrounded them and came out to meet them as they returned from the fields at night. It was the evening of a beautiful summer's day at Iona. Since early morning the monks had been reaping the corn, and now in the cool of the evening they were returning home, when at a certain spot, half-way between the field and the monastery, each of them became conscious of a strange feeling of welcome and comfort which swept away their fatigue and made them happy and well content. All had had the same feeling for some days, yet none had spoken of it till that night. Then the gentle Baithene asked the others if they had not noticed something strange about a certain place, mid-way between the fields and the monastery. One of the elder brothers replied:

"Yes!" said he: "every day at this hour and place, I breathe a delicious odour as if all the flowers of the world were collected here. I feel also something like the flame of the hearth which does not burn me, but

warms me gently: I experience, in short, in my heart, a joy so unusual, so incomparable, that I am no longer sensible of either trouble or fatigue. The sheaves which I carry no longer weigh upon my back, though they are heavy: from this place to the monastery the weight seems to be lifted off my shoulders. What then is this wonder?"

Baithene answered him.

"I will tell you what it is," he said. "It is our master Columba: always full of anxious care for us, he is disturbed because we are so late, he is grieved to think of our fatigue and so, not being able himself to come to meet us, he sends his spirit out to refresh us, to rejoice and console us." (I., xxix., Montalembert's translation.)

We have all felt the same cheer and consolation when returning from a long day: the knowledge of the friend who waits for us and of his love for us in our weariness, surrounds and supports us to the end. Modern pilgrims to Iona, walking home to the site of Columba's monastery from the fields where the monks worked, naturally go by way of Temple Glen, a fertile valley leading out on to the pasture-land behind the monastery. After the steepest part of the hill has been breasted there is a spot where one naturally pauses to draw breath, and there on a summer evening, the fragrance of innumerable wild flowers reminds us of the delicious odour breathed by the monks—"as if all the flowers of the world were collected there." And the soft breeze blowing over the pastures, the salt tang of the sea in the air, the beauty and peace of the whole scene fill our hearts with "a joy so unusual that we are no longer sensible of either trouble or fatigue."

During these last peaceful years at Iona, Columba had many visitors who came to ask his advice. Aidan came to him in all his difficulties, for Columba was his "soul-friend" or confessor. Once Aidan brought his sons, about whose fate he was anxious, to ask the Saint to foretell their future. Speaking of the three

elder boys, Columba predicted that they would all die in battle. "But if thou hast any younger sons," he added, "let them come to me. That one whom the Lord hath chosen to be king will at once rush into my arms." Aidan called his younger sons and one of them, a fair-haired lad called Eochaidh Buidhe, came running to the old man. Columba put his arms round him and kissed and blessed him, foretelling that he should succeed his father and have a long and happy reign, leaving descendants to carry on the dynasty. And that fair-haired lad was the ancestor of the House of Stewart, of our present king.

We see Columba in his latter days, the tempestuous years of his life past, his vindictive spirit curbed, his impetuous nature softened, his heart full of love for his fellows, his one thought how he could best help them and in them the Church of Christ. For no missionary ever yet succeeded without a kindly and practical interest in his people. Columba showed in himself how the life of a Christian must be full of love and care for his fellow-beings, how nothing was too small to consult him about, how their lives and their families and all their concerns were his too, and how the religion of Christ could best be followed by living for others. That was why he attracted the people so much. They saw he cared for them, and so they brought him all their troubles, and he never failed them. In all accounts of his life we see, after the early Irish years, no selfish thought, no consideration for himself. He knew what things mattered and what did not: he knew that earthly treasure was of no value in comparison with the love of God and man. Adamnan illustrates this for us in a story of how the Saint, when staying in Morvern, met a man whose home had been destroyed by a band of robbers. Columba comforted the unhappy victim whose thoughts at once flew to his wife and children.

"Go, my poor man, go!" said the Saint. "Thy whole family hath escaped by flight into the mountains,

but thy cattle and all thy belongings have been carried off by the robbers." The man was comforted and went home to find his house in ruins, his animals stolen, the work of years destroyed. But his "dear little family" was safe.

It was in May 597 that Columba began to feel his days were numbered. He was now so feeble that he could no longer walk over to the fields to encourage the monks at their work, and so the old white pony was harnessed to the cart and the aged Saint was driven for the last time towards Machar, to see how the brothers were progressing with their labours.

They saw him coming and gathered round him, for they watched his strength failing day by day and knew he must soon leave them. The old man began to speak to them:

"During the Easter solemnities in the month of April now past," he said, "with desire have I desired to depart to Christ the Lord, as He would have allowed me had I preferred it. But lest a joyous festival should be turned for you into mourning, I thought it better to put off a little longer the time of my departure from the world."

The monks could not restrain their grief, and Columba, seeing their eyes wet with tears, did his best to cheer them, telling them how full of blessing his life had been, how he was weary now and would fain be at rest. Then, still sitting in the little cart, he turned his face to the east and blessed the island with its inhabitants. "From this very moment," he said, "poisonous reptiles shall in no wise be able to hurt man or cattle in this island, so long as the inhabitants observe the commandments of Christ." (II., xxix.) Adamnan adds that from that day the "venemous reptiles with the three-forked tongues could do no manner of harm to man or beast." We are apt to think of the similar blessing wrought for Ireland by St Patrick, and it is a fact that no "serpent" or adder is known in Iona to-day, though they are

occasionally to be met with across the Sound, in Mull. But the story is, of course, symbolical.

Having blessed the monks, the island and its inhabitants, Columba was driven back to his hut. A few days later he was celebrating the solemn office of the Mass on the Lord's Day, when the monks noticed that as he raised his eyes to heaven, they shone with glory: he had seen a vision of an angel hovering over the altar and its "lovely and tranquil aspect infused joy and exultation into his heart." For this angelic visitor had come to tell Columba that after an interval of six days, he was to receive his heart's desire and depart to the Lord on the Lord's Day.

On the Saturday following this vision, Columba and his faithful Diarmit went out, that the Saint might take farewell of his monastery. First of all they went to bless the barn, and Columba, now bent and frail, went into the hut and blessed it and the two heaps of winnowed corn which lay upon the floor. Mindful always of the welfare of his monks he was glad to see that as he had to leave them they had sufficient corn to ensure their food supply till the next harvest. Diarmit could not bear Columba's constant references to his death, "This year, Father," he said, "thou often vexest us by frequently making mention of thy leaving us!" And Columba, wishing to console him, replied that if he would promise faithfully not to reveal to anyone what he told him, till after Columba's death, he would speak more openly about his departure. Diarmit, flinging himself down at his master's feet, gave the promise.

"This day in the Holy Scriptures is called the Sabbath,[1] which means rest," said Columba. "And this day is indeed a Sabbath to me for this is the last day of my present laborious life; on it I rest after the fatigue of my labours. And this night at midnight, which commenceth the solemn Lord's Day, I shall go

[1] Sabbath in those days was our Saturday. The practice of calling the Lord's Day the Sabbath did not come into use till a thousand years later.

the way of our fathers. For already my Lord Jesus Christ deigneth to invite me, and to Him in the middle of this night I shall depart at His invitation."

Diarmit wept bitterly at these words, and Columba did his best to comfort him. Together they left the barn, Columba leaning on Diarmit's arm, for the Saint was now so weak he could not walk alone. Nor could he make the short journey to his hut without a rest, and presently he sat down on the grass by the roadside. While he rested there the old white pony came up to him, pushed its nose into his hand and rubbed its head against his arm, "inspired by God to do so, as each animal is gifted with the knowledge of things according to the will of the Creator." The pony whinnied and "uttered plaintive cries," shedding tears on the Saint's bosom, "foaming and greatly wailing." Diarmit, who had not the same sympathy or understanding for animals as his master, would have driven the poor beast away, but Columba forbade him: "Let it alone as it is fond of me," he said: "let it pour out its bitter grief into my bosom. Lo! thou, as thou art a man and hast a rational soul, canst know nothing of my departure hence, except what I myself have told thee. But to this brute beast devoid of reason, the Creator Himself hath evidently in some way made it known that its master is about to leave it." (III., xxiv.) And Columba fondled the pony and blessed it and presently the poor beast wandered away, dejected and forlorn.[1]

In a little while Diarmit helped Columba to his feet, and together they climbed slowly up the little hill which stood above the monastery.[2] Columba stood looking down on the little cluster of buildings and beyond them out over the Sound to the distant mountains and the everlasting sea. "It was then that there came to him

[1] The horse of supernatural foresight is common to the folk-lore of many lands.

[2] Probably the little rocky eminence on the slope to the north of the present Abbey. The hill called the Torr-Ab, or Abbot's Hill is unlikely for various reasons to have been the hill ascended by Columba.

the calm of those who have fought the good fight and have sailed their craft into a quiet haven "—and only those who know the wonder of the long June nights at Iona can imagine the peace and serenity that filled his soul. Raising both his hands in blessing, he spoke that famous prophecy so fully to be fulfilled in after years—"Unto this place, small and mean though it be, great homage shall yet be paid, not only by the kings and peoples of the Scots, but by the rulers of foreign and barbarous nations and their subjects. In great veneration too, shall it be held, by the holy men of other Churches."

Then, Diarmit supporting him, Columba went slowly down the hill to his hut where he tried to continue his work on the copy of the *Book of Psalms* he was engaged on: even on this last day of his life, he was not to sit in idleness. He had been working at Psalm xxxiv. and had just written the tenth verse, *Inquirentes autem Dominun non deficient omni bono—But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.* That sentence brought him to the foot of a page, and there his strength failed him. He felt he could write no more, that his work on earth was done.

"Here I must stop," he said to Diarmit. "Baithene must write the rest."

Columba had already chosen Baithene as his successor, and he probably meant by these words that Baithene was to finish all that he had left undone.[1] For it was Baithene who wrote the next verse, so appropriate to the new abbot—*Venite, filii, audite me, timorem Domini docebo vos—Come ye children and hearken unto me, for I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*

Columba then went to the church, to the "nocturnal vigils" of the Lord's Day. That service over, he returned to his hut and lay down on the couch, a bare stone flag with a small rounded stone for pillow. While lying there, his body utterly worn out but his mind clear as ever, he gave Diarmit, who was alone with him, the last message for his monks.

[1] For many years the reigning abbot always nominated his successor, who was called the *Heir* or *Co-Arb* of Columcille.

"These, O my children, are the last words I address to you—that ye be at peace and have unfeigned charity among yourselves, and if you thus follow the example of the Holy Fathers, God, the Comforter of the good, will be your Helper.

And I, abiding with Him, will intercede for you: and He will not only give you sufficient to supply the wants of this present life, but will also bestow on you the good and eternal rewards which are laid up for those that keep His commandments."

These were the last words of Columba. He lay silent till the bell rang for the midnight service. Then he rose and hastened to the church. He had gathered up his strength for this last effort, for he entered the church before Diarmit and the others, and coming to the altar, knelt down before it in prayer. The monks, coming more slowly, saw the whole church lighted up with a heavenly light. Diarmit, knowing how weak Columba was, felt alarmed, and hurried after him.

"Father! Where art thou?" he called out anxiously.

But there was no answer. The radiance had faded from the church, and as Diarmit groped his way forward, lighted only by the feeble flicker of his lantern, he came to the body of the Saint lying before the altar. Kneeling down beside him, Diarmit raised Columba's wasted body in his arms and laid his head on his bosom.

The other monks hurried in with their lanterns, the tears running down their cheeks as they saw that their abbot was dying. Columba looked around him from side to side, his face full of joy, "seeing, no doubt, the holy angels coming to meet him."

Then he made a sign: Diarmit lifted up the Saint's right hand that he might bless his little family. No longer able to speak, Columba moved his hand to convey his last blessing—"an angelic radiance filled the church around him on every side, and there the venerable old man sent forth his spirit to heaven,

into the delight and into the joyance of heaven's household." [1]

So Columba breathed his last. His face remained lit with the joy of his vision, and he lay peacefully as if asleep.

Thus on the 9th of June, 597, Columba finished his work on earth. The monks stayed on in the church and sang the matin hymns, the sense of desolation heavy on all. Then, chanting the Psalms as they went, they bore his body back to his own hut. For three days and nights his obsequies were celebrated with all honour and reverence. And then "when the sweet praises of God were ended, the venerable body of our holy and blessed patron was wrapped in a clean shroud of fine linen, and being placed in a coffin prepared for it, was buried with all due veneration, to rise again with lustrous and eternal brightness." (III., xxiv.)

A few days before Columba died, one of his monks, who had been speaking about the future of the monastery, said to him, "After thy death all the people of these provinces will row across to Iona to celebrate thine obsequies and will entirely fill it." But Columba had replied, "No! my child . . . a promiscuous throng of people shall not by any means be able to come to my obsequies: none but the monks of the monastery will perform my funeral rites and grace the last offices bestowed on me." And so it was. For after Columba's death, a wild storm arose, which blew so violently during three days and nights, that no boat could live in the Sound. The monks had the consolation of rendering their master the last services in the privacy of their own community, without the crowds which would fain have come to pay homage to his memory. His beloved family alone laid him to rest—"the wind screaming over the frail roof of the church, the great candles flickering in the salt draught, heartbroken monks singing out the Psalms of the dead against the organ

[1] Stokes, *Lives of the Saints*, from the Book of Lismore, p. 181.

tones of heaven. . . . And in their midst . . . the dead Saint, clad in the robes of his office, calm and peaceful, with his fierce, passionate life in the service of God left behind him for ever." [1] Immediately the funeral rites were over, the wind fell and a great calm reigned over the island.

A few days later a young Irish priest resolved to go across to Scotland to put himself under the guidance of Columba. But before he set out, two Columban monks arrived at the place where he was, and on being asked, "Is he well, your holy father Columba?" the monks burst into tears.

"Our patron is indeed well," they replied, "for a few days ago he departed to Christ." (I., ii.)

The place where the body of the Saint was laid was visited by multitudes of those who cherished his memory. About a hundred years after his death his remains were transferred to a beautiful shrine of gold and silver, and for more than two hundred years Iona was a place of pilgrimage. After that the plundering of the Western Isles by Scandinavian pirates began, ravages which had been prophesied by Columba: "My heart and mind hath been sore troubled," he said, "by an advision that hath been given me . . . for meseemeth at the end of time men will besiege my churches and kill my monks and violate my sanctuaries and ravage and desecrate my churchyards and dismantle my dwelling-places." [2] To prevent the body of their founder suffering desecration, the monks carried his shrine over to Ireland: it was brought back again and taken over again several times, but danger still threatening, it was finally taken to Down, where the relics of Patrick and Bridget had already been laid. According to the old stave:

> His grace in Hii without stain,
> And his soul in Derry;
> And his body under the flagstone
> Under which are Brigid and Patrick.

[1] Shane Leslie, *Isle of Columcille*, 120. [2] O'Donnell, § 151.

Two stone coffins lie together in a little ruined oratory at the main door of the present Abbey of Iona: one of these is said to be the original coffin of Columba, the other that of Blaithmac, one of his successors, who was put to death by Danish pirates in 825 because he refused to disclose the place where Columba's shrine had been hid. But though there may be doubt as to the last resting-place of Columba's body, his spirit dwells in Iona. No one can fail to feel his influence there, no one but can see him in imagination walking over the upland pastures or standing on the white sands looking out to sea. No lover of Iona can repeat the old Gaelic prophecy, *In the Isle of Dreams God shall yet fulfil Himself anew*, without feeling that for him at least, it has come true.

It is a wonderful story. More than thirteen hundred years ago this Irish saint sailed over the seas to Scotland in a frail wicker coracle. He subdued the fiercer passions of the Picts. He made friends with their king living in the stronghold of the Druids. He overcame the Druids and outdid their magic. He secured the independence of the kingdom of the Scots. He brought civilization to a lawless people. He improved their methods of agriculture, their husbandry, and their social relations. It is impossible for Scotland to exaggerate the debt she owes Columba. He founded her national unity, he brought about her inter-tribal peace and not only improved her whole mode of living, but set an ideal before her and brought to her the Bread of Life. All these blessings Scotland owes to the genius of Columba.

In conclusion we cannot do better than quote the words of Montalembert:

> "We can see him before us, the tall old man with his fine and regular features, his sweet and powerful voice, the Irish tonsure high on his shaven head and his long locks falling behind, clothed with his monastic cowl and seated at the prow of his coracle, steering

through the misty archipelago and narrow lakes of the north of Scotland and bearing from isle to isle, and from shore to shore, light, justice, truth, the life of the conscience and of the soul. . . . He was full of contradictions and contrasts . . . led by pity as well as by wrath, ever moved by generous passions, and among all passions, fired to the very end of his life by two which his countrymen understand the best—the love of country and the love of poetry . . . despising rest, untiring in mental and manual toil, born for eloquence and gifted with a voice so penetrating and sonorous that it was thought of afterwards as one of the most miraculous gifts he had received of God. Frank and loyal, original and powerful in his words as in his actions—in cloister and mission and parliament, on land and sea, in Ireland as in Scotland, always swayed by the love of God and of his neighbour, whom it was his will and pleasure to serve with an impassioned uprightness.

Such was Columba."

CHAPTER XVI

LINDISFARNE: THE CRADLE OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY

And this great favour has also been granted to this man of blessed memory, that although he lived in this small and remote isle of the British Ocean, his name has deserved to be honourably made known, not only throughout the whole of our Ireland and Britain . . . but to reach even as far as triangular Spain and the Gauls and Italy that lies beyond the Pennine Alps, even to the City of Rome itself. . . .

Adamnan, III., xxiii.

COLUMBA'S influence was not arrested by his death. His successors at Iona were wise and good men under whom the founding of Christian colonies went on, far distant sometimes from the mother-island, though subject always to her jurisdiction. But the "glory of Iona" was not based entirely on its Church: its piety and open hospitality were even more famous in those fighting days. Iona was a sure refuge where a welcome awaited every fugitive, and where, after the claims of hospitality had been met, instruction in the Christian faith would be offered him.

It was in 597, the year Columba died, that Gregory's emissary, the monk Augustine, arrived in Britain. Columba's Church was therefore established in the north before the Roman missionaries arrived in the south. Augustine's mission flourished greatly at first, chiefly through his conversion of Ethelbert, king of Kent, and his court, but after Ethelbert's death, the progress of the Roman influence was checked and the people fell away from Christianity back to their old pagan beliefs.

In the north, a temporary check on the influence of Iona was caused when Aidan of Dalriada was defeated by Ethelfrid, the pagan king of Northumbria, in a

battle fought at Dawston Rigg in 603. (Northumbria consisted of the united kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia, extending from the Tees to the Forth.) But though, in defeating the Scots, the Northumbrians checked the influence of Iona and the spread of Christianity for a time, they were soon to receive the Iona message through one of their own princes. Ethelfrid was killed in 617 in a battle against his cousin Edwin, who thus became king of Northumbria. Edwin was a pagan, but he married a Christian princess, sister of Eadbald, king of Kent, and she only consented to become Edwin's wife on condition that she should be allowed to continue her Christian worship at her husband's court. And so, when she travelled north to Northumbria, she took among her retinue several Christian priests led by Bishop Paulinus. This Paulinus—of the Roman Church—was the first Bishop of York, and is said to have converted twelve thousand people in forty days. But though he had a successful mission and ultimately converted Edwin, the results of his labours were not to endure. In 633 Edwin was killed at Heathfield in battle against the combined forces of Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon of Strathclyde; Paulinus was driven south, and Northumbria was again under pagan rule.

But when Ethelfrid of Northumbria was killed in 617, his younger son Oswald fled to Iona. He lived there for some years, entering whole-heartedly into the life of the monastery and being trained with the younger brothers. Seeing the monks set out to preach the Gospel, Oswald was fired with a desire to go and do likewise, and on leaving Iona he gathered together a small army, and in the spirit of a crusader rallied his fellow-Northumbrians round him. He had pitched his camp at Heavenfield near Hexham (635) one night, prepared for battle the next day, and while sleeping in his tent, he had a dream that Columba stood before him "gleaming with angelic beauty, his lofty figure touching the clouds with the crown of his head." In his dream Columba spoke to him, "Go forth from the

camp to battle this very night," he said: "the Lord has granted to me that your enemies shall be put to flight and your foe, Cadwallon, delivered into your hands, and that after the battle you shall come back victorious and shall reign happily." Waking from his dream, Oswald hastily summoned his chiefs and warriors. Inspired by this vision of Columba and borne forward on a wave of religious enthusiasm, they rushed into battle, Oswald bearing the Cross as his banner, and defeated Cadwallon, whom Penda had set to rule over Northumbria.

Though king of Northumbria, Oswald was at heart a missionary; his chief aim was the conversion of his subjects, and he was now free to ask the monks of Iona to send him a bishop "by whose teaching and ministry the nations of Angles . . . might both learn the gifts of faith in the Lord and receive the Sacraments." But Corman, the first Iona missionary who came, made no impression on the English, and soon went back to Iona to report that he could make no headway, that the English were barbarous, and obstinate, and deaf to his teaching. The Seniors were deliberating on this deadlock, when one of their number called Aidan said to Corman, "It seems to me, brother, that you have been unduly hard on your unlettered hearers and that you have not fed them, as the Apostle commanded, with the milk of the word, so that by graded nourishment they might receive complete teaching and obey the loftier precepts of the Lord." The other Seniors agreed with Aidan, and thinking him, from his sympathetic attitude marked out to minister to the Northumbrians, they sent him to Oswald. And "when the bishop, who was not skilful in the English tongue, preached the Gospel, it was most delightful to see the king himself interpreting the Word of God to his commanders and ministers. . . . From that time many of the Scots came daily into Britain and with great devotion preached the Word. . . . Churches were built . . . the people joyfully flocked together to hear the

word: money and lands were given of the king's bounty to build monasteries." [1]

This gentle abbot, in quest, no doubt, of the peace and quiet of Iona, founded the Church of the Angles on Lindisfarne (634), now called Holy Island, but connected with the mainland by a narrow isthmus covered at high tide. Like its mother-church of Iona, Lindisfarne was on terms of cordial friendship with the Church of Ireland, but owed allegiance neither to Ireland nor to Rome. Aidan's only ecclesiastical superior was the Abbot of Iona. Many Iona monks came to finish their training at Lindisfarne, whence they spread over England, "monasteries and schools were built where English children were taught by Celtic missionaries from Ireland and from the coast of Scotland." [2]

But the political history of England about this time was stormy. Oswald was killed in 642 in battle against Penda of Mercia, and Deira and Bernicia were ruled for a time by two kings, Oswy, Oswald's brother, and Oswin, a cousin of the late King Edwin. They soon disagreed, and Oswin being killed, Oswy was left alone to face Penda, the sole remaining champion of paganism in England. At the battle of Winwæd (a river near our city of Leeds) in 655, Oswy defeated him and the influence of Lindisfarne was at last free to spread over the whole of southern Britain from the Thames to the Forth, with the exception of Kent and East Anglia, the conquests of the Roman Church.

Though Aidan was active in sending out missionaries and establishing Christian colonies, he also recognized the importance of educating and training men to carry on the work. Of the twelve young Northumbrians he selected and trained as his followers, several became famous. Eata, the Abbot of Old Melrose, of Ripon, and finally of Lindisfarne, was the spiritual father of St Cuthbert. Wilfrid was the Judas of the band, for it was largely owing to his action that the work of the Celtic

[1] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, III., iii.

[2] Lightfoot, *Leaders of the Northern Church*, p. 47.

Church in England came to an end. The brothers Cedd and Chad are remembered for their persuasive and successful preaching and their gentle ways. Chad, the more famous of the brothers, went as a youth to a monastery in Ireland, returning to complete his education under Aidan at Lindisfarne, so that he was entirely the product of the Celtic Church and was to carry on its tradition, as we shall see, long after it had withdrawn north of the Tweed.

Aidan's own character seems to have been singularly perfect. Bede describes him as a man " of surpassing gentleness and self-restraint . . . who lived among his friends none otherwise than as he taught and cared not to seek anything or love anything belonging to this world." Bede also praises Aidan's love of peace and charity, his tenderness in comforting the afflicted and relieving or defending the poor. There is a story that Oswin, to lessen Aidan's fatigues on his constant journeyings, gave him a horse. While riding this fine animal one day, Aidan met a beggar who asked for alms, and having nothing to give but his horse, the Bishop did not hesitate. But Oswin was annoyed: " Were there not poorer horses or less costly gifts," he protested, " to bestow upon a beggar ? " " What sayest thou, King ? " expostulated Aidan. " Is yon son of a mare more precious in thy sight than yon son of God ? "

Aidan died in 651, and his successors, Finan (651–661) and Colman (661–664), trained by the Seniors at Iona, carried on the activities of Lindisfarne according to the teaching of Columba. The missionaries they sent out were simple, earnest men, who lived only to spread the Gospel, who preached the love of Christ, the power of God, and life everlasting as the reward of all faithful believers. Such were the foundations on which these devout men built up the Church of Northumbria.

It was in the year of Aidan's death that a simple shepherd lad called Cuthbert sought admittance to Eata's monastery of Old Melrose, where the Tweed sweeps round " under the woods and rocks of Bemersyde."

Trained in the Lindisfarne tradition, Cuthbert carried the pure Iona message from Melrose through Nithsdale and the Lothians. But in later years, when he followed Eata to Ripon and came in touch with Roman influences, he transferred his allegiance to Rome and ceased to be a spiritual son of the Celtic Church. He lived for eight years as a hermit on one of the lonely Farne Islands, with no companions save the eider duck called by his name. There he built himself in, that he might see nothing of the beauty which surrounded him. This reminds us more of the ascetics of the Middle Ages than of a son of Columba, who found so much of his joy and inspiration in nature. Cuthbert emerged from his retirement to rule as Abbot of Lindisfarne for two years; then he went back to his hermitage to die. He had a wonderful gift of attraction: he drew men to him, and owing, perhaps, to his early years of solitude herding sheep on the Lammermoor Hills, he had an understanding sympathy for animals. There are stories of his friendship with otters and sea-birds, and there is a legend that once when Cuthbert and a companion were hungry and had no food, he saw an eagle and ordered his pupil to follow it. The youth did so, and presently came back carrying a large fish which the eagle had swooped down on and captured from the river. Cuthbert cut the fish in two and asked the youth to take half of it back to the eagle "that God's kindly messenger might not be without a dinner."

In the thirty years after Oswald asked the Seniors of Iona to send him a bishop, the influence of the Iona mission spread over the whole of central England. "There is no mystery," writes Dr M'Ewen, "in the success of the mission. The character of the missionaries reached a singularly high level and was maintained with real consistency. Columba's personality had many Celtic blemishes, but in his successors these disappeared. Of violence, contentiousness, and dogmatism, the besetting sin of monks, they showed no sign . . . their intense zeal, their genuine humility, their scriptural

and evangelical fidelity are attested by every witness. . . . Withal they showed a spirit of personal religion and of individual responsibility, an indifference of officialdom and ritual and a steadiness of Christian purpose which invest their work with a halo brighter than that of romance." [1] The Celtic Church was influencing not only our own islands, but, through its learned monks who spread over the continent of Europe, the whole of western Christianity. "From the nest of Columba," wrote O'Donnell, in a play upon words, "those sacred doves took their flight to all quarters." Celtic monks led the missionary movement in Europe.

Although Rome afterwards engulfed this Celtic Church, it is not to be forgotten that Lindisfarne was the well-spring of Christianity in England, and that Lindisfarne was founded and governed by the Seniors of Iona, the direct descendants of Columba. "The Columban monks made a second Iona at Lindisfarne, with its church of hewn oak thatched with reeds, after Irish tradition in sign of poverty and lowliness and with its famous school of art and learning. . . . Their missionaries wandered on foot over middle England and along the eastern coast, and even touched the channel in Sussex. . . . For the first time, also, Ireland became known to Englishmen. Fleets of ships bore students and pilgrims who forsook their native land for the sake of divine studies. . . . Under the influence of these Irish teachers the spirit of racial bitterness was checked and a new intercourse sprang up between English, Picts, Britons and Irish. . . . The peace of Columcille, the fellowship of learning and piety, rested on the peoples." [2]

Until the death of Aidan the Columban Church had not come into collision with the Church of Rome, although there were many points of difference between

[1] M'Ewen, *History of the Church of Scotland*, p. 85.

[2] Alice Stopford Green, *Irish Nationality*, Home Univ. Lib., p. 47.

them. The doctrines and ritual of the Columban Church were of the simplest; it had no elaborate ceremonial of the mass, no worship of saints and angels, but of all the differences those concerning the date of Easter and the form of tonsure were the most controversial.[1] When Gregory the Great sent Augustine to England in 597, the latter tried ineffectually to bring the British Church into line with the Church of Rome on these points, but under Laurentius, who succeeded him, southern Ireland accepted the change of the date of Easter and the form of tonsure. The Abbot Seghine (623–652) of Iona was approached on the subject, but although he entered into correspondence with Rome, no change was made in the practice of the Columban Church at that time. It is difficult to understand the heat of controversy raised over such apparently unimportant points. It could not matter how the Culdees (as the monks of the Celtic Church came to be called) wore their hair, or on what day they celebrated Easter, especially as the Columban Church was really adhering to the old computation of Easter and had merely failed to change the date when Rome found out her mistake and computed the date correctly. The Roman Church felt, no doubt, that with all Europe in her power, this outlying island Church must be made to conform to the general usage and submit itself to the authority of Rome. But the Scots were dour even then and refused to abandon their independence. Even St Cuthbert, mild and gentle as he was, when he first met with Roman practices at Ripon, refused to adopt them and came north again to Melrose, to the usages of Lindisfarne and Columba. He was later to go over entirely to the Roman Church, and become one of her most success-

[1] The Celts traced their tonsure to the Apostle whom Jesus loved, and called it the tonsure of St John, while the Roman Church claimed that their tonsure was that approved by St Peter. The Celtic tonsure consisted of shaving the front part of the head; the Roman form was a little crown or "corona" on the top of the head.

ful advocates. The influence of Rome did gradually insinuate itself northwards; the younger monks of the Scots Church came to think that union with the Church of Rome and its great organization and culture, would open up a way to wider fields than lay before them in their own island, and would further the cause they had at heart, as nothing else could.

Up till 664 the Seniors of Iona were still the ecclesiastical Superiors of Lindisfarne, but under the Abbot Colman, that power passed. King Oswy "having been taught and baptized by the Scots, and being very well versed in their language, considered nothing better than what they had taught." But his Queen, Eanfled, had been brought up in the Church of Rome, and so in the celebration of Easter "when the King's fast was over and he was keeping the Lord's feast, the Queen and her attendants were still fasting and celebrating the day of palms." That was awkward, no doubt, and the polished and diplomatic churchmen of Rome urged the union of the two Churches, or rather the merging of the small Columban Church in the powerful Church of Rome. One of the chief advocates of this course was Wilfrid, Abbot of Ripon, who had been one of Aidan's own Northumbrian students but had become a convert to the Church of Rome. Wilfrid was a skilful speaker, and he persuaded Oswy that the whole question must be finally decided. Oswy, therefore, convoked the Council of Whitby (664), which was held in the monastery presided over by the Abbess Hilda. Wilfrid pled that the Columban Church should no longer "stupidly resist the whole world in the date of the celebration of Easter. Although your fathers were holy," he urged, "can a handful of men, living in a corner of a remote island, be preferred to the universal Church? . . ." And Colman—a gentle old man whose simple speech was no match for the dialectics of Wilfrid—"seeing that his doctrine was scorned and his sect despised, gathered round him those who were willing to follow . . . and retired into Scotia to deliberate with his own

people." All his Iona brethren and some of his English converts went with him, and before leaving he asked that Eata of Old Melrose, one of Aidan's students, might be made Abbot of Lindisfarne. Oswy gladly agreed to this, and Eata was not asked to conform too strictly to the usages of the Roman Church. It was reported by Bede that when the Roman prelates hurried to Lindisfarne to take possession of the headquarters of the Celtic Church, they were amazed to find no riches there, not even comfortable dwellings. "Apart from flocks, they (the Scots) had no moneys. For if they received any money from the rich, they gave it straightway to the poor. . . . The whole anxiety of these teachers was to serve God, not the world . . . and hence also the habit of religion was at that time in great veneration; insomuch that wherever any cleric or monk arrived, he was joyfully received as a servant of God by all. Yea, if he were discovered as he went upon the way, they ran to him, and bowing their necks rejoiced to be either signed by his hand or blessed by his mouth." [1]

The work of the Iona mission in England was done: its settlements, with the exception of a small community at Lindisfarne, were now merged in the Church of Rome. The Seniors of Iona quietly accepted this fact and concentrated all their energies on the west and north of Scotland. The Church of England, far from looking down on Iona, continued to regard it as a centre of learning and piety, Oswy—whose sympathy was with the Iona mission—sending his son there to be educated under Adamnan.

It was in the very year of the Synod of Whitby that Chad succeeded his brother Cedd as Abbot of Lastingham, rising to a ruling position in the Church at the time that its ecclesiastical headquarters changed from Iona to Rome. Both brothers accepted the change of ritual and government "in the interests of discipline," though both were at heart loyal sons of the Celtic Church!

[1] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, III., xxvi.

Wilfrid, who had been made Bishop of York when the Roman Church came into power, had gone over to France to be consecrated, and in his protracted absence Oswy insisted on Chad accepting the See of York (666). He was consecrated by Wini, Bishop of Wessex, and two other British Bishops, and at once began to perform the duties of his new office—"to apply himself to humility, continence and study: to travel about, not on horseback but after the manner of the apostles, on foot; to preach the Gospel in towns, the open country, cottages, villages and castles, for he was one of the disciples of Aidan and endeavoured to instruct his people by the same actions and behaviour."

But in 669, Pope Vitalian appointed Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury, charging him to travel through England and sweep away all traces of the Scots Church. When he came to York he protested that Chad's consecration was defective and that Wilfrid, who had now returned, was the true Bishop of York. Chad replied that he would willingly resign his office, for he had never felt himself worthy of it and had only accepted it because the king insisted. Theodore could not help admiring Chad's humility and good grace; he reconsecrated him, and when, soon afterwards, the Bishop of Mercia died, Chad was made Bishop of Mercia and Lindisfarne, with Lichfield as his See. Theodore was evidently attached to Chad, with his gentle ways, and told him he must in future make his long journeys on horseback; but this seemed to the humble Bishop too ostentatious a mode of travelling, and Theodore had to lift him onto his horse himself—"for he thought him a holy man."

Chad's ministry marks the end of the Columban influence in England. He was the last Bishop to be consecrated by British Bishops, and his consecration was considered void for that reason and had to be celebrated again according to Roman usages. He was a simple, lovable, humble man, characteristic of much that was best in the Columban Church, whose

devoted son he was. With his death in 672, the last traces of the Iona mission in England disappear. "While we are thankful," wrote Bishop Lightfoot, "that the foundations of our Northumbrian Church were laid on the simplicity and devotion, the free spirit, the tenderness and love, the apostolic zeal of the missionaries of Iona, we need not shrink from acknowledging that she learnt much from the more complete organization and the higher culture of which Rome was then the school-mistress."[1] . . .

[1] Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, 51

CHAPTER XVII

COLUMBA'S INFLUENCE ON THE SCOTTISH NATION AND CHURCH

It was under the rule of Adamnan (679–704) that Iona herself adopted some of the practices of the Roman Church. After a visit to Ireland he arrived back at Iona with the Roman tonsure, and would no doubt have celebrated Easter according to the Roman Calendar, had he not died before that season. Six years later, Nectan, king of the Picts, commanded that the Roman tonsure and the Roman date for the observance of Easter should be adopted throughout his kingdom. This law caused a division in the monastery at Iona, one body of monks with their Abbot going over to the usages of Rome, while the other body, presumably the older monks, remained faithful to the memory of their Patron, and abode by his customs. For nearly fifty years two abbots led two parties at Iona: it was not till 767 that the Columban adherents were finally vanquished as regards the Easter controversy and the form of tonsure.

Then began the plundering of the monastery by Danes and Norsemen. In 794 Danish pirates raided the monastery: in 801 Scandanavians burned it: in 806, sixty-eight monks were killed by pirates who landed at Martyrs' Bay and there slew the brethren who had bravely come down to confront them.[1]

[1] This bay is sometimes called the Bay of the Dead because the dead brought to Iona for burial were, and still are, landed there. The coffin was rested on the grassy mound called the Eala, at the top of the bay, carried three times sunwise round it, and then along the Street of the Dead to the Reilig Oran. Iona

Though this period marks the end of the sending out of missionaries from Iona, it does not mean that the Columban Church had failed. It had accomplished what its founder had intended: it had shown the people of Britain the better way of Christianity as against pagan superstition and belief. That was the function of Columba's Church, and his monks now recognized that it was better for Britain to range herself on the side of Europe than to persist in isolation. And as the incessant raids of the Scandanavians made Iona untenable as a centre of Christian activity, the Primacy of the Columban Church was transferred to Kells, and this change weakened the position of the Iona settlements throughout Scotland. But the Celtic Church at Iona still contrived to keep its torch flickering, and ultimately the different Christian colonies became united as one Christian kingdom under a Christian king.

The monks at Iona lived in daily dread of hostile visitors. Columba's grave was opened, his remains taken out and placed in a beautiful gold and silver shrine which was carried over to Ireland for safety. It was brought back about 818, and it was in defending it that the heroic Abbot Blaithmac met his death. He was celebrating Mass in the Church one day in the year 825 when the Danes rushed in, demanding to know where the shrine of precious metals had been hid. On Blaithmac's refusing to divulge where he had secreted it, he and his monks were massacred.

We must now turn for a moment to the national history of Scotland. Before King Aidan died in 606, he had been heavily defeated, and the fortunes of the Dalriadans seemed to be on the wane. Aidan was succeeded by the Eochaidh Buidhe of Columba's prophecy, and after six more kings of that line of Fergus Mor, the succession passed to the line of Loarn Mor,

was for centuries the holy place of Scotland, and so many wished to be laid in her holy soil that there were at one time nine places of burial on the island.

another of the sons of Erc.[1] In 843 however, the succession passed back to the descendants of Aidan in the person of Kenneth MacAlpine, son of a Dalriadic Chief, but of Pictish descent on his mother's side. Kenneth took forcible possession of the district of Fortrenn, the stronghold of the Picts (which corresponds roughly speaking to the district between the rivers Tay and Forth), and the union of the two races was helped by the fact that the Vikings had now penetrated inland and were pushing south from Caledonia and north from Galloway, leaving behind them a ravaged and devastated country. The only hope for the Picts and Scots was to present a united front to their savage foes, and this union of races was not merely of political import—as in the earlier history of the Scots, Church and State moved together.

Now that Iona had ceased to be the religious centre of the country, Kenneth established the headquarters of the Church at Dunkeld, the Abbot of Dunkeld became the first Bishop of Fortrenn, and some of Columba's relics were brought from Kells to sanctify the Church. This *Ecclesia Scoticana* or Church of the Scots was independent: it acknowledged no superior, neither Rome nor England: it practised the simple religion of Columba. And Kenneth established it on the very borders of Pictland to ensure that the two races should be one in religion as well as in nationality. The early history of Scotland is the history of the Church of Scotland—"Just as the planting of the Scottish race in the west of Scotland is unintelligible without Columba, so the definite recognition of *Ecclesia Scoticana* was an inseparable part of the formation of the Scottish nation. If the institutions and organism of that Church were not destined to be permanent, the reason lay in the fact that they embodied the religion of a growing race

[1] It will be remembered how the Dalriadan colony was brought to Scotland in the end of the fifth century by the three sons of Erc, Fergus Mor, Loarn Mor, and Angus Mor. Aidan was descended from the line of Fergus Mor.

which had not yet reached maturity. . . . The identification with national life has proved permanent and has secured continuity, spite of the elimination of the Celtic element in the eleventh century, of Romanism in the sixteenth, and of what may be called without invidiousness English Episcopacy at the close of the seventeenth: *Ecclesia Scoticana* has been a *res*—vital and vitalizing, progressive and national. In fact, Scotland has no history apart from the Scottish Church."[1]

And here we see the fruition of the little colony of Dalriada. Carefully nurtured in its early years by Columba, it had now grown into a strong and powerful kingdom: it was united in nationality and religion with the Picts from whom Columba had come over from Ireland to protect it: it was ruled over by a descendant of King Aidan whom Columba had consecrated at Iona, and it was ministered to by the Church of the Scots which he had founded on his remote island. It was from the Dalriadic race, through the line of Fergus Mor, Gabhran, Aidan, and Kenneth MacAlpine that the royal house of Scotland sprang, and the *Ecclesia Scoticana*, served by the monastic clergy now known as the Culdees, was the direct heir of Columba's monastery at Iona, the direct ancestor of the present Church of Scotland.

Those who would detract from his fame have sometimes described Columba, scornfully, as a "politician." But given the circumstances of his mission, no one could have succeeded without a practical interest in the "political" life of Caledonia. How could a mission prosper in a land inhabited by two races living in enmity with each other? Columba was, in truth, more than a missionary. He had the far-seeing vision of an empire builder. But even when we take that for granted, his success is not yet explained. "In Columcille's lifetime," writes one of his admirers,

[1] M'Ewen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 and 115.

"three thousand men laid down their lives in battle, to save for him a little book into which he had copied the Psalms." [1] Here we have the clue. It was Columba's magnetic personality, guided by his steadfast faith, that enabled him to achieve his ends.

We have traced his hand as it first moulded Church and State in Scotland. We have followed the Iona mission to England, and seen its development along the lines he laid down. In so far as Scotland and her Church have influenced the growth of our Empire, so far must Columba also have his due.

[1] O'Kelleher, Introduction to American edition of O'Donnell.

APPENDIX

I

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF IONA, 860–1905

THE outline of the subsequent history of Iona may be told in a few words. Kenneth MacAlpine was buried there in 860, and for two centuries after this all but four of the Scottish kings were laid there including, it is said, Duncan and MacBeth. Irish, French, and Norwegian kings also were buried at Iona for, as Pennant says, "all were ambitious of lying in this holy spot." When Dean Monro visited the island in 1549 he found "three tombs of staine, formit like little chapels, with ane braid grey quhin stane in the gavill of ilk ane of the tombes. In the stane of ane is written *Tumulus Regum Scotiæ* . . . within this tomb according to our Scotts cronikels, ther layes 48 crowned Scotts Kings. . . . The tomb on the south syde forsaid has this inscription *Tumulus Regum Hiberniæ*, that is, the tomb of the Ireland Kings, for we have in our auld Eirsche cronikels that ther wes foure Ireland Kings eirdit in the said tomb. . . . Upon the north syde of our Scotts tombe the inscription bears *Tumulus Regum Norwegiæ*, that is the tombes of the Kings of Norroway. . . ." There are now no traces of these three chapels, though the beautifully carved stone slabs of the monarchs lie in a long line called the *Ridge of the Kings*, and mark, no doubt, the site of the chapels.

About 1000 the Western Isles were seized by the Norwegians who held them for seventy-four years. All this time the Church of the Scots had retained its Columban character and had withstood the influence of

Rome. But in 1072 the Western Isles fell into the hands of Malcolm Canmore who had married Margaret, sister of Edgar Atheling. She had been brought up in England under a Benedictine monk, and was distressed at what seemed to her the unseemly practices of the Scots Church. She was a devout, charitable woman of such winning personality and earnestness of purpose, that the Scots saw her reasonableness and recognized that she was not trying to make their Church conform in all things to the Church of Rome, that she was "a reformer of Religion rather than of the Church, and influenced the tone of Christianity rather than its ordinances." She argued her points so simply and truly, that the leaders of the Celtic Church gave way to her pleading and adopted the changes she pled for, which included a more seemly ceremonial in the observance of the Sacrament, a more general partaking of which she urged on those who had held back from a feeling of unworthiness. Malcolm Canmore and Queen Margaret visited Iona, and finding the monastery in a ruinous state, they rebuilt it and left the monks wherewithal to carry on their work. It was not till the time of David I., son of Malcolm and Margaret, that the authority of the Church of Rome was fully accepted in Scotland and the Celtic Church, as such, disappeared from the mainland, the Culdees being driven out.

At Iona, through terrible years of dread and anxiety on account of the Scandinavian pirates, the Culdee descendants of Columba held on. In 1093 the Western Isles were ceded to Magnus Barefoot, king of Norway, and seem for fifty years to have been cut off from Scotland. Then in 1156 Somerled, Celtic chieftain of Argyll, who had married a Norwegian princess, proclaimed his son Reginald, King or Lord of the Isles. The king of Norway challenged this in a battle which ended in a draw, and the combatants agreed to divide the Western Isles between them. Iona, falling to the share of Somerled, was once more in Scottish hands. About 1200 Reginald established Benedictine monks

at Iona, as well as a community of black nuns, probably Augustinian Canonesses. The Benedictines turned the Columban monks out of their monastery, on hearing of which some Ulstermen led by bishops and abbots descended on Iona and levelled the new Church of the Benedictines to the ground, for they regarded it as an insult to the memory of Columba.[1] But the Benedictines finally drove out the Columban community, who left Iona in 1204, having occupied the island for 640 years. The Benedictines called their settlement St Columba's monastery and dedicated their church to the Virgin. They built cloisters, the remains of which are still to be seen beside the Abbey, itself a later building, dating probably from the end of the fourteenth century.

In 1266 Norway finally ceded the whole of the Western Isles to Scotland, and Iona remained in the hands of the Lords of the Isles and the Benedictines till the Reformation.

The great Abbot Mackinnon, whose recumbent effigy and cross are to be seen in the Abbey, was the last Abbot of Iona. During his Abbacy, probably about 1389, Iona became the headquarters of the Bishopric of the Isles, because it had the finest church and was the most sacred place in the diocese. The Bishop of Iona had jurisdiction over all the Hebrides as well as over the Isle of Man.

At the time of the Reformation, the Scots Parliament passed an Act (1561) suppressing all monasteries. The monks of Iona scattered abroad, the Abbey and monastery were devastated and all the manuscripts of the library disappeared. Some were said to be buried on one of the Treshnish Islands; the rest were probably carried by the monks to monasteries abroad, which may explain the finding of four out of the seven principal

[1] This early Benedictine Church may have been built at the opening of the Temple Glen, where an artificial looking mound suggests that were excavations carried out, some trace of this church might be found.

manuscript copies of Adamnan's *Life of Columba* on the Continent, two in Switzerland, and two in Bavaria: that in Schaffhausen is probably the oldest existing Scottish MS.

In 1609 a Bishop of Argyll called Andrew Knox held an Assembly of Chiefs at Iona, who drew up a series of *Statutes of Icolmkill* in which they agreed to keep the churches in repair and provide a regular ministry to promote the keeping of Sunday.

In 1635 Iona was seized from the Bishops of the Isles by the MacLeans of Duart. King Charles I. ordered that the island be restored to the Bishops, and commanded the Lords of Exchequer to vote £400 for the repair of the Cathedral Church of Icolmkill. Civil war intervening, this order was never carried out.

In 1693 the Dukes of Argyll became the overlords of Iona. Sacheverell, Governor of the Isle of Man, who visited the island about this time (1688) wrote, "Although the people had no minister they gathered together in the Abbey Church on Sundays and spent most of the day in private prayer." The Abbey was then already beginning to fall into decay and nothing apparently was done to perserve it.

In 1899 the ruins were presented to the Church of Scotland by George, eighth Duke of Argyll, thus reverting to the direct descendant of that humble monastic settlement founded there by Columba in 563. And on the thirteen hundredth anniversary of his death, June 9th, 1897, members of the various Protestant Churches of Scotland met in the ruins to commemorate the Founder of the Scottish Church and Nation.

The restoration of the ruins was proceeded with as soon as adequate funds were collected, and on June 9th, 1905, the restored Abbey was reopened for public worship.

The old Gaelic Prophecy attributed to Columba had in part come true:

> Iona of my heart,
> Iona of my love,

Instead of monks' voices
Shall be the lowing of cattle;
But ere the world shall come to an end
Iona shall be as it was.

II

LIST OF COLUMBA'S FOUNDATIONS IN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND.[1]

THE following is a list of the places directly connected with Columba. He was patron Saint of some, others have or had chapels dedicated to him, others hold or held their yearly Fair or Market on St Colm's Day, or at least in his month, a revival of the old custom of celebrating his Festival, the 9th of June. This list is not complete, as during the course of centuries many places changed their patron saints, and the chapels built by Columba and his monks fell into ruins: it shows, however, how widespread were the labours of the blessed Columcille and his disciples. Columba was the patron saint of Scotland for several centuries, till, owing to the influence of Queen Margaret, he was superseded by St Andrew. But the Highlanders still look on Columba as their patron saint.

IRELAND

Derry.	Clonmore.
Durrow.	Kilmacrenan or Cill-mac-Nenain.
Kells.	Gartan.
Tory Island.	Glencolumkill.
Drumcliff.	Templedouglas.
Swords, Sords or Sords-Choluim-Chille.	Asslyn.
Raphoe.	Skreen.
Kilmore.	Ballynascreen.
Lambay.	Screen.
Moone.	Drumcolumb.
	Columbkille, Longford.

[1] Full particulars of all these foundations are to be found in Reeves' *Adamnan*, from which this list is adapted.

Emlagfad.
Glencolumbkille.
Kilcolumb
Knock.
Termon-Maguirk.
Cloghmore.
Columbkille, Kilkenny.
Ardcolum.

Armagh.
Mornington.
Desertegny.
Clonmany.
Desertoghill.
Ballymagroarty.
Ballymagrorty.
Eskaheen.

SCOTLAND

Among the Scots

Tiree.—Soroby, formerly Campus Lunge.
Elachnave.
Skye.—Loch Columkille, Kilmuir.
Fladda-Chuain or Fladda of the Ocean.
Trodda.
Snizort, formerly Kilcolmkill.
Eilain Coluimcille, Portree Bay.
Stornaway.—Garien.
Lewis.—Fy or Ui.
St Colm's Isle.
Harris.—Bernera.
North Uist.—Kilcholmkill.
Benbecula.—Kilcholambkille.
South Uist.—Howmore.
St Kilda.
Canna.
Inverness.—Island Columbkill, parish of Kilmalie.
Appin.—Kilchallumkil at Duror.
Ardchattan.—Kilcolumkill, now Kiel.
Morvern.—Kilcolmkill.
Mull.—Kilcollumkill, Quinish.
Kilcollumkill, Salen.
Oronsay.
Islay.—Kilcholumkill, Kildalton.
Kilcholumkill, Kilarrow.
North Knapdale.—Cove.
Kintyre.—Kilcolumkill.
Bute.—St Colomb's, Rothesay.
Renfrew.—Kilmacolm.
Ayrshire.—Largs.
Wigton.—Kirkcolm.
Dumfries, St Columba, Cærlaverock.

Among the Picts

Orkneys.
Burness.
Hoy.
Caithness.
St Combs.
Dirlet.
Sutherland.
Island Comb, parish of Tongue.
Killcolmkill, Brora.
Nairn. Auldearn.
Inverness-shire.
Pettie.
Kingussie.
Banff.
St Colm's, Aird, parish of Fordyce.
Alvah.
Aberdeenshire. Lonmay.
Daviot.
Daviot.
Belhevie.
Monycabo or New Machar.
Forfarshire.
Cortachy.
Tannadice.
Perthshire.
Dunkeld.
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